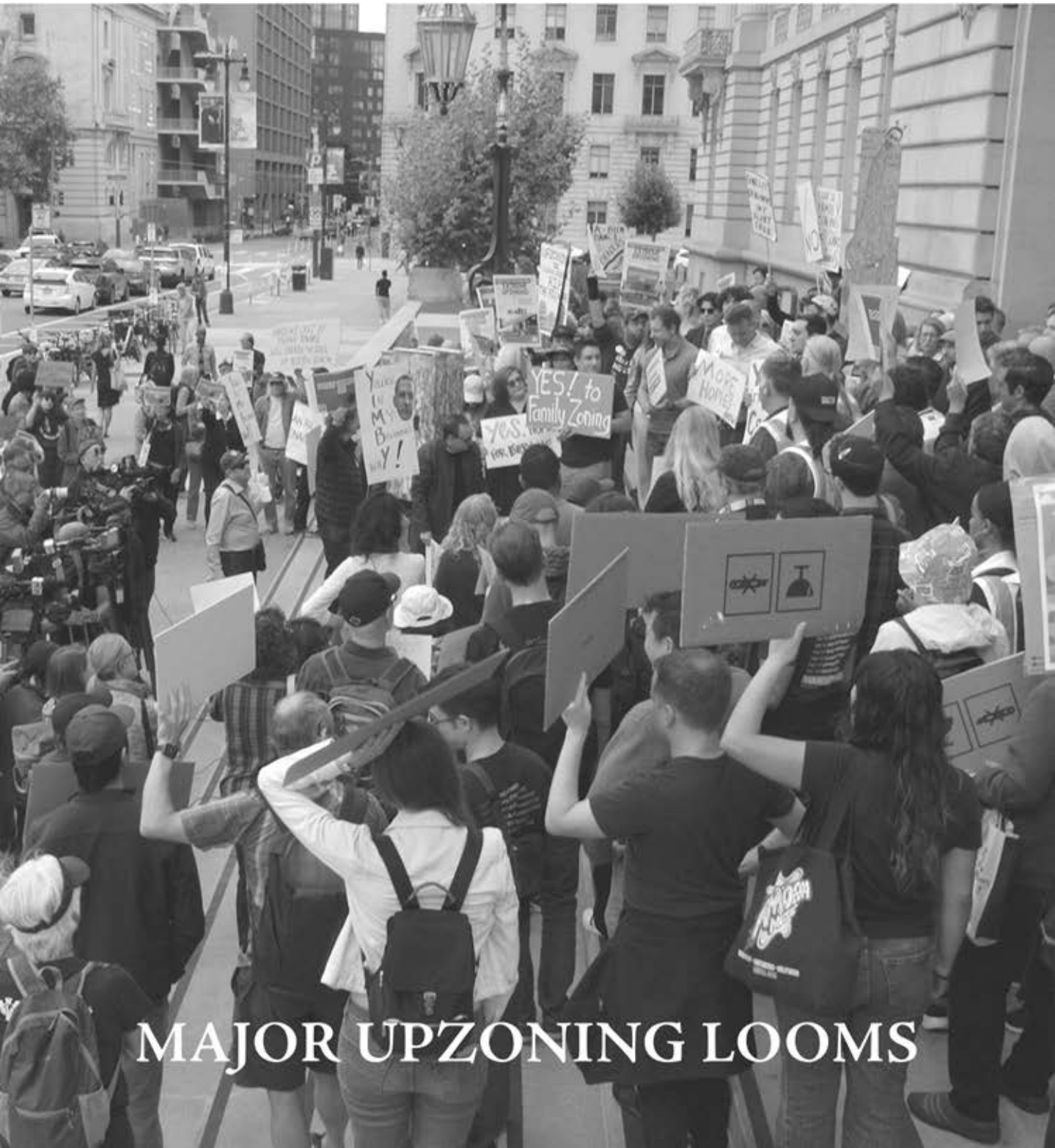
The Semaphore

A Publication of the TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

Issue 250 Autumn 2025



MAJOR UPZONING LOOMS

KIDS CORNER

by Sarah Kliban
kids@thd.org

Welcome to Kids Corner! THD wants to hear from kids from the neighborhood and The City in general! If you'd like to ask a question, or you're a kid and want to be interviewed, please contact us at: kids@thd.org.

© Lulu Wang

SCARLETT WANG-BOLER, 9

What is the very best food in the world?

"Spaghetti. You can have different kind of sauces. If you have red sauce, it has different spices in it and tastes really good all together. I feel really happy and energized when I eat it."

How old is 'old'?

"Like a hundred, because not a lot of people get that old. They might go to nursing homes then and probably start to get white hair."

What will be different in our world in 20 years?

"There'd probably be a lot of rich people and school would only be twice a week. There might be different kinds of cars. The houses would probably be a lot bigger and more expensive."

What is your most treasured possession?

"My pet bunny Maple. She's my first very own pet. I've had her for two years. She's really soft. Sometimes she might bite though. She's my friend, and it's nice to have your own pet."

What is your favorite place in San Francisco?

"Somewhere in Chinatown or movie theaters. I love movie theaters. It's nice to have comfy seating because you don't always have that at home. It's better than anywhere else, and I'm really into any kind of movies. The AMC Kabuki is a fun experience. If I could, I would go three times a week."

© Sarah Kliban

ARHAN CHANDRASEKARAN, 12

What is the very best food in the world?

"Ice cream because there are so many variations and flavors. There's like one that fits everybody. It's sweet, but you can also make it healthier. I love chocolate a lot. Any variation of chocolate is good. Jeni's makes *Blackout Chocolate Cake*, and it's really good."

How old is 'old'?

"It depends on who you're hanging out with. If you're with a bunch of ten-year-olds, then 25 is really old. If you're hanging out with 40-year-olds, then 40 is not that old. I think 50 is when you're really old."

What will be different in our world in 20 years?

"I don't think it will look drastically different outside. There might be more skyscrapers. Technology will be a lot different. People will be working less hard because they have AI doing all the work for them. There will be automated ways to do everything."

What is your most treasured possession?

"My computer because there's lots of stuff you can do on it. I can use it to talk to people, play games, listen to music, all that great stuff. It would be frustrating without it. I'd have to watch movies on the TV, call people on the phone, wouldn't have a good device to play games…"

What is your favorite place in San Francisco?

"Dogpatch Games. I have a lot of fun there. It's a place where I can forget about all the stress of school and life. I can have fun with my friends playing games."

© Lulu Wang

PAULINA WANG-BOLER, 11

What is the very best food in the world?

"I like tacos. You mix and match all the flavors, different veggies. It's very varied and you can put whatever you want into it. I feel happy and glad I'm eating tacos."

How old is 'old'?

"60. That's when you start getting wrinkles and you start looking older."

What will be different in our world in 20 years?

"We'll have flying cars. You could teleport and time travel and there would be better quality beef and food. Better quality water. Fried chicken in a liquefied form. It would taste good."

What is your most treasured possession?

"My sketchbook. It has all my drawings. I'd be really sad if I lost it because I like looking back at them and seeing what I did well. It feels like an accomplishment. I like drawing characters from books, movies, or games."

What is your favorite place in San Francisco?

"We used to live on Vallejo Street, and there's this garden area on top of Russian Hill. You can look down and see almost the entire city. It's really pretty there. You can see the Ferris wheel, and there's a tree that I like to climb."

© Pip Trollope

PIP TROLLOPE, 13

What is the very best food in the world?

"Piña Colada. Virgin Piña Colada. I can just drink it over and over and over again, and I never get sick of it. It's just so good."

How old is 'old'?

"Over 40. When I think of people over 40, a certain stereotype pops up for me: grey hair, wrinkly, older-looking. They don't know how to use technology properly or well. And texting. They text very grammatically, but that's not how you text!"

What will be different in our world in 20 years?

"There'll be a lot more Waymos and a lot more AI. We're already on that track of having mostly everything be AI. We're not really on a track to fix global warming. It'll either be better or worse, and I don't know how that will make things look different around us. I do hope that global warming gets better. I also do really like AI, but I hope it doesn't take away jobs from artists and graphic designers. I don't want people to lose their jobs."

What is your most treasured possession?

"Earrings that my dad gave me for my birthday. It's my one nice pair, and I only wear them for special occasions. Even my regular jewelry, I make sure no one touches it."

What is your favorite place in San Francisco?

"The Main Library. I can bus there really easily. It's a really quiet place, and it's good for me to get my work done. And they have a lot of stuff there. It's really calming and really quiet, which is a stark comparison to my home. There are usually people bustling around. It's noisy and hard to get work done. Going to the library is an easy escape."

EDITOR'S NOTE:

We have devoted a large portion of this issue to the San Francisco Mayor's Upzoning Plan, a proposal that has engendered much controversy. It is important to note that the views of the writers are theirs and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

THERE'S NOTHING "FAMILY" ABOUT IT:
The Truth Behind The So-Called "Family Zoning" Plan

by Nick Ferris
President@thd.org

Hello, THD:

Our neighborhood is facing two major pieces of legislation that could fundamentally reshape the fabric of our community. The first is Mayor Daniel Lurie's San Francisco Family Zoning Plan, a sweeping proposal that would upzone large portions of San Francisco under the banner of helping families. The second is Supervisor Danny Sauter's "District 3 Thrives" legislation, focused on revitalizing our small-business corridors. In this issue, I've chosen to focus on Mayor Lurie's plan because it is, quite simply, one of the most significant and potentially consequential pieces of land-use legislation I have seen in years. In an upcoming column, I will share my perspective on the "District 3 Thrives" legislation. I only mention it to make you aware because most residents and small businesses have never heard of it.

The Mayor's recently announced "Family Zoning" proposal arrives with a warm and welcoming name. Who could oppose something designed to help families stay in San Francisco? Yet behind the branding, the proposal has little to do with families and everything to do with upzoning large portions of The City. It represents a far-reaching change in how our neighborhoods are planned and protected, dressed up in the language of affordability and inclusion. Having grown up in San Francisco and seen many friends and families pushed out due to affordability, I find it very easy to see through this plan.

San Franciscans deserve an honest conversation about what this proposal really is. "Family Zoning" may sound benign, even wholesome, but, in reality, it is a massive deregulation of neighborhood zoning controls that would allow larger, taller, and denser buildings in many parts of the city, without any requirement that they serve families at all. This "family zoning" does not ensure affordability and certainly does not protect families.

The Proposal

Let's start with what the proposal actually does. The mayor's plan removes long-standing local limits on height, bulk, and unit density. It replaces neighborhood-based zoning rules with a new "form-based" code. It's an approach that determines how tall and wide a building can be, rather than how many homes it might contain. On paper, this might sound technical and quite reasonable, but the result is simple: Developers could build far more units and taller buildings on the same lot than ever before, so long as they fit within a prescribed outer "shell."

That shell, however, is incredibly elastic. What do I mean? These proposals, when combined with state density bonuses and The City's own local incentives, "form-based" zoning effectively opens the door to tower-scale development on parcels previously limited to mid-rise buildings.

This is real. Look no further than the recent proposal at 955 Sansome Street. Do you think that's a one-off? How about the one at 1088 Sansome? Do you think it stops there? There are parcels in North Beach and all along the waterfront where this is possible. And this is where constituents voice concerns about becoming Miami Beach and opening the door to skyscrapers. Sadly, this is not hyperbole.

Join the
Telegraph Hill Dwellers!

Go to *thd.org*,

and become part of this active community!

Why the "Family" Branding Is Misleading

Words matter in public policy, and "Family Zoning" is a masterstroke of political marketing. Yet the name obscures what the legislation actually does. There is nothing family-specific about it: no mandate for two- or three-bedroom homes, no provisions for outdoor play areas, no targeted affordability tiers for working parents.

Instead, the measure would allow market-rate developers to build smaller, higher-yield apartments wherever they can assemble lots, precisely the opposite of what families typically need. The language of "family" simply makes a citywide upzoning sound more compassionate, when its real beneficiaries are the developers and investors positioned to capitalize on relaxed rules.

San Francisco has seen this previously. Prior initiatives branded as "Opportunity Housing" or "Housing for All" promised inclusion and affordability but ultimately produced expensive, one-bedroom units. "Family Zoning" risks repeating the same pattern, a policy that sounds people-centered but is driven by production metrics rather than livability. There is a better way forward and I'll get to this in a moment.

How It Impacts District 3

For District 3, which includes North Beach, Russian Hill, Nob Hill, Telegraph Hill, Jackson Square, and Chinatown, the implications are profound. These are neighborhoods defined by historic, human-scale character, narrow streets, and vibrant small-business corridors. They are also already among the densest residential areas in the entire city.

Under previous upzoning maps advanced by the prior administration, District 3 was excluded. City planners recognized that our existing form and infrastructure could not support further height or bulk without significant consequences.

Under the new proposal, that protection has disappeared. This is a factual difference, not a personal accusation. The change reflects a shift in political priorities since the election of a new mayoral administration and District 3 supervisor. What was once recognized as a neighborhood worth preserving has suddenly been reclassified as an "opportunity area." The community was not consulted before this reversal appeared on The City's zoning maps.

When Density Stacks upon Density

To understand the magnitude of the change, consider how three separate density mechanisms now interact:

- Local density decontrol: removing the cap on how many units can be built on a parcel,
- State density bonuses: allowing developers to add height and bulk (often 50% or more),
- Form-based zoning: setting loose outer shells rather than precise height and unit limits.

Individually, each of these changes increases allowable size. Together, they compound and produce results far larger than most residents or even some policymakers realize.

The 955 Sansome Street proposal illustrates this effect. Under stacked incentives, a parcel once envisioned for modest infill could host a massive tower that overwhelms surrounding blocks and becomes taller than Telegraph Hill itself. The same dynamic could soon repeat across District 3 if the "Family Zoning" plan is adopted as written.

A Better Path Forward

We often hear from the Mayor and other elected officials that there are real consequences if San Francisco does not meet the state's housing mandate and, specifically, that The City risks losing control entirely. It's true that under state law, failing to meet housing targets could trigger what's known as the Builder's Remedy, allowing developers to bypass local height and density limits. But it's also important to remember who created this framework and what choices remain.

The current mandate stems from legislation written by our very own State Senator Scott Wiener, which dramatically expanded the state's role in local zoning. These laws require cities to plan for a certain number of homes under the Regional Housing Needs Allocation system. San Francisco's target, more than 82,000 new homes by 2031, is one of the most ambitious in the country.

If a city's zoning is not deemed compliant with its state-approved Housing Element, the Builder's Remedy can indeed take effect. That provision allows developers to propose projects of any height or density in any district, provided they include a minimum percentage of affordable units. In theory, it could strip The City of meaningful ability to shape new projects or protect historic districts.

But that outcome is not inevitable. There are other, better options than a citywide upzoning disguised as "Family Zoning." San Francisco can meet its state mandate while preserving the scale and livability of its neighborhoods through a balanced and good-faith approach.

- Targeted, Context-Sensitive Upzoning: Concentrate new housing along major transit corridors and underutilized commercial areas where infrastructure already supports greater density rather than imposing blanket upzoning on already dense historic neighborhoods like North Beach or Chinatown.
- Adaptive Reuse and Conversion Credits: Count the conversion of downtown offices, hotels, and public buildings into housing toward our state targets. With millions of square feet of underused commercial space, San Francisco has enormous untapped capacity without touching our most fragile residential districts.
- Phased Compliance: Adopt zoning changes in measured phases, demonstrating steady progress rather than rushing through a single, sweeping ordinance. The state's housing department allowed other cities to maintain compliance through incremental, good-faith action.
- Partnership and Negotiation: Work directly with state officials to secure flexibility or extensions, as other California cities have done. Compliance is not a one-size-fits-all mandate; it's a dialogue that rewards planning and transparency.
- Legislative Reform: Engage our regional legislators, including Senator Wiener himself, to refine the Builder's Remedy law and Housing Element process. If San Francisco demonstrates constructive alternatives that still meet state goals, it can help lead a more sensible, statewide reform effort.

In short: The Builder's Remedy is a risk but not an inevitable outcome. The City still has the tools and leverage to comply with state law while protecting the integrity of its neighborhoods. What we need is thoughtful, transparent planning, not a rushed, citywide upzoning marketed as "family housing."

Conclusion: "Family" Should Mean Belonging

Words like 'family' should mean more than marketing. They should reflect policies that make it possible for working parents, seniors, and children to thrive together in the neighborhoods they love.

Regrettably, Mayor Lurie's "Family Zoning" plan does not do that. It replaces community planning with density decontrol and calls it compassion. San Franciscans deserve better, an honest plan that strengthens families without sacrificing the character, scale, and history that make our neighborhoods feel like home. One proposal is above.

Let's build for families, not just for figures on a zoning spreadsheet.

FRIENDS OF WASHINGTON SQUARE

Meet on the 2nd Tuesday every month, with work parties in the Square every quarter.
See website for times, dates, locations.
www.friendsofwashingtonsquare.com

PARKS & TREES REPORT

WINNERS AND LOSERS OF THE SUMMER

by Mike Rothmann, Committee Chair
mike.rothmann@thd.org

THD/FUF Plantings: A Two-Year Update

It's been six months since the last Parks and Trees Report, and over the course of this year, we've seen things that have brought the neighborhood to life and others that have left it a little worse than before. To begin on a positive note, the street trees planted during our Fall 2023 collaboration with Friends of the Urban Forest are thriving, and the enthusiasm seems to be spreading!

Of the initial 49 trees planted, 46 have survived, one has been replaced, and two were, unfortunately, removed because they were planted in basins located too close to an overlooked utility line. Some trees, particularly those on the east side of the hill, have seen tremendous growth, such as the Brisbane Box at 1130 Sansome Street, now extending well above its stakes after only two years.

These plantings have helped to spark a broader trend of neighborhood beautification in North Beach. Sidewalks are filling in with new trees and sidewalk gardens, thanks to numerous well-intentioned and hard-working organizations and individuals. My greatest appreciation goes to my neighbors who week after week, cultivate, water, and clean up their part of the hill. They continue to stun me with the beauty they create on our streets, alleys, and steps.

The SF Parks Alliance Scandal: Real Impacts to our Community

In stark contrast and what feels like a real slap in the face to locals in particular, this summer we witnessed the unraveling and swift collapse of the Parks Alliance. For over a decade, the organization helped fund many projects and commemorations like Crane Cove Park and the 150th Anniversary of Golden Gate Park. Its downfall is due to the mismanagement of millions of dollars it received from private donors and from as many as 80 neighborhood groups while acting as a fiscal sponsor, a necessary partnership for many of these groups to work with the city.

Among those affected are Friends of Pioneer Park and Friends of Washington Square Park, which lost roughly $70,000 and $10,000, respectively. These are serious amounts for volunteer-run organizations not unlike the Telegraph Hill Dwellers, and they deserve restitution. Without their stewardship, the parks lose support for initiatives that provide historical context, a local voice, and connections that help keep these places the landmarks that they are. As of June 3, the Parks Alliance has shuttered. The process for these groups to submit claims and recover funds is ongoing. Let's hope they're made whole.

The SF Parks Alliance was a major organization that partnered with San Francisco's Recreation and Parks Department (RPD) and the Port of San Francisco. The remnants of that partnership are still visible around the neighborhood.

These include an oversized set of toy boxes displayed next to the playground in Washington Square Park and the ungainly SkyStar ferris wheel looming brightly over the wharf. Neighbors, including those who committed time and money that for now seems to be lost, continue to live with reminders of a corrupt organization that failed them.

Obituary: Three Lombardy Poplars in Marini Plaza

As this report previously noted concerning the cypresses on the north side of the Coit Tower parking lot, sometimes when trees become giants, they end up being in the wrong spot. Often this goes hand-in-hand with years' deferred maintenance and suboptimal pruning. Such is the case for three of the five remaining Lombardy poplars in Marini Plaza. This small triangular oasis across from Washington Square Park is a spectacular space. It's dense with greenery and, on occasion, visited by a heron fishing in the koi pond.

Unfortunately, the removal of the poplars by RPD now seems unavoidable. An arborist review in 2023 documented serious concerns, including co-dominant trunks and damage to the surrounding fencing. The risks are real. This year there have already been a couple of catastrophic tree failures in the area, and these particular poplars stand directly above a bus stop on Columbus Avenue.

By the time of this publication, the trees will likely already be removed. The southern magnolia might one day grow to fill in the gap, but with most of the poplars gone, the Park will at least temporarily lose its lush appearance. Their removal is a reminder to keep planting, keep enjoying, and keep renewing our urban forest.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENTS AND IMPACTS: NORTH BEACH

by Peter Stevens
peter.stevens@thd.org

Owner Francesco Covucci (top right) greeting happy diners.

In most parts of the city, golden arches signify McDonald's. In North Beach, thanks in part to our formula retail ban, we often think of North Beach Restaurant, a community institution going back more than 55 years. It inhabits a building constructed in 1907 that has three vaulted arched ceilings. This design is so unusual and iconic to North Beach that when the neighboring building—currently housing Luke's Local—was erected, the architect mimicked North Beach Restaurant's arches in its design. While we all love the restaurant's beautiful architecture, what is more important than the outside of the building is what is inside.

North Beach Restaurant has long been a favorite of locals, politicians, celebrities, and the Who's Who of the city. Telegraph Hill Dwellers recently held an impromptu board dinner there and were a table away from no other than our Congressional Representative Nancy Pelosi. It is not uncommon to see former mayors Willie Brown or Art Agnos enjoying a meal. However, in 2023, there was a question if that year would mark the end of an era. The restaurant was slated to close.

Thankfully, Francesco Covucci, a well-known North Beach restaurateur with a resume that includes Il Casaro, Barbara, and the California Fish Market, did not let this happen. He acquired the restaurant and reopened it at the end of 2024.

North Beach is not a neighborhood that happened by accident. It takes community leaders and community investment to nourish its soul and keep its spirit strong. Francesco has demonstrated time and time again that he is one of these leaders. Beyond his business activity, he has given to multiple North Beach organizations and frequently opens his space for community events and meetings. This is what community development looks like. It is the point where physical space (land use) meets culture and people (community).

Take, for example, THD's Films with Friends. This program was started after COVID to encourage people to come together again in community to watch movies and patronize their local bars/restaurants/other neighborhood establishments. Films with Friends started as a partnership between Telegraph Hill Dwellers and Those Guys Renegade Cinema. This year, with generous support from Francesco and North Beach Restaurant, it was able to expand its venues and show movies that were a little more mainstream. Due to Francesco's generosity, we were able to create a "kids' night" at Piazza Pellegrini, showing movies like *Alvin and the Chipmunks* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. I'm hearing rumors that we might even have a screening of *The Godfather* in North Beach Restaurant's wine cellar, so keep an eye out for an email about that.

You might be asking, how is the food since it re-opened? At our board dinner, the restaurant did not disappoint. We shared fritto misto and burrata appetizers. I do recommend the braised beef cheek and the pasta della casa. The tiramisu and bomboloni are great ways to finish any meal. But, of course, the one thing that is better than eating good food is dining with friends in such a welcoming community space.

DISTRICT 3 SUPERVISOR'S REPORT

by Supervisor Danny Sauter
Danny.Sauter@sfgov.org

IN DEFENSE OF THE FAMILY ZONING PLAN

Neighbors, I imagine you may have heard about Mayor Lurie's proposed Family Zoning Plan by now. There's been a lot of information (and plenty of misinformation) shared around, so I wanted to offer a few FAQs.

We've been hard at work to improve the plan, including sponsoring bills to strengthen small business protections, expand tenant protections, increase family-sized homes, and incentivize mid-rise housing rather than high-rises. I hope this information helps, and please do reach out with any further questions or feedback.

What is the Family Zoning Plan and What Happens if We Don't Act?

Mayor Lurie has proposed the Family Zoning Plan to allow for more homes because San Francisco is required by the state to pass a compliant housing plan that creates zoning capacity for an additional 82,000 homes. This plan is due no later than January 2026.

If San Francisco's plan is not certified by the state, a mechanism called the "Builder's Remedy" would kick in. The builder's remedy essentially allows any height and any form to be built anywhere with no input required from local governments or residents, resulting in skyscrapers where 40-foot height limits used to exist. **In short, if we want to avoid seeing high-rises everywhere and want to retain local control, we must pass a compliant housing plan and we must do it soon.**

Will this result in High-Rises in North Beach and Telegraph Hill?

No. This will not allow high-rises in North Beach or Telegraph Hill. Most of North Beach and Telegraph Hill would see no changes in height limits. A few blocks in the northern part of North Beach would be allowed to go two floors higher while others would be allowed to go 10 feet higher.

In Fisherman's Wharf, new homes can already be built up to 6-8 stories under existing state law. The proposed changes simply allow this to now happen under the local program. This is important because it means San Francisco would have more control of design standards, more protections for small businesses, and more incentives for affordable and family housing. Areas around Fisherman's Wharf have been included in proposed zoning changes for the past two years as first proposed by former Supervisor Aaron Peskin.

Some areas will adopt "density decontrol," which does not allow any additional height but does allow more living units within the same height limit. This simply allows many of the types of homes we live in already in District 3 to once again be legalized and built. In fact, some 54% of our city's homes would be illegal to build under today's zoning codes, including much of District 3!

Why does District 3 need to be included in this plan?

Much of District 3, including North Beach and Telegraph Hill, is part of the state's designated Housing Opportunity Area. This is a classification for neighborhoods that are high resourced with good schools, transit, services, and access to jobs but have not built much housing in the last few decades. The state requires that we concentrate our new homes in these areas to ensure we correct past harms from segregated zoning laws, inequitable planning practices, and a lack of creation of new homes in recent years.

Will renters be protected in this plan?

Yes. As a renter of almost 15 years in North Beach, I take concerns about tenant protections very seriously. **Let me be clear: Renters are protected in this plan, rent control is not changed, and there are actually options to add new homes that will be under rent control.**

I'm proud to be a co-sponsor of Supervisor Chen's tenant protections legislation that establishes the strongest protections possible under this housing plan.

Will the Family Zoning Plan result in more affordable homes?

Yes. These new homes will need to follow all existing affordability requirements. There is a requirement for more two- & three-bedroom units to support families as they grow.

The plan also calls for nearly 20,000 new homes for lower-income households.

What about building demolitions?

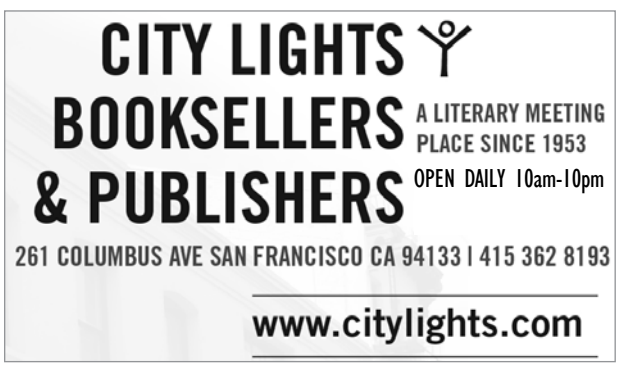
Demolitions of housing are extremely rare in San Francisco, and we are working to keep it that way. Last year, of more than 1,000 evictions, only three were due to demolitions. The year prior saw zero evictions via demolitions. Recent rezonings have shown that most new homes come via empty parcels or commercial sites.

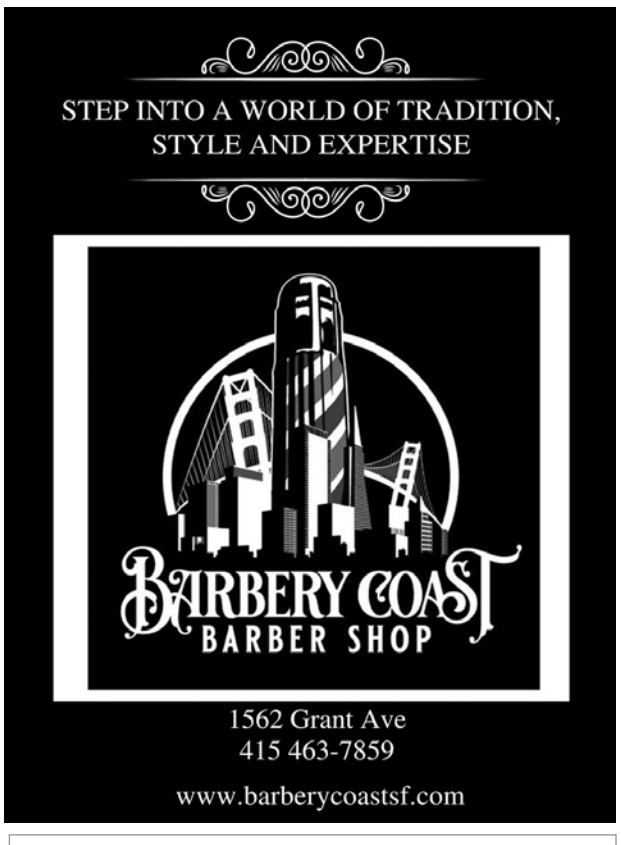
Any demolition of multi-unit housing would have to be approved by the Planning Commission, go through an extensive public process, provide 1:1 replacement homes, allow first right of return for tenants, and provide a similar price of rent. Paired with robust tenant protections, residential demolitions will continue to be extremely rare.

We've collected more FAQs on our website so you can read more: *https://sfbos.org/supervisor-sauter-family-zoning-plan-faq*.

While this edition of my *Semaphore* report was focused on housing, rest assured we've also been busy in the district on key priorities around supporting small businesses, improving public safety, and taking care of our streets, sidewalks, and parks. I look forward to sharing more soon and, as always, please feel free to reach out if we can be of help in the neighborhood: *Danny.Sauter@sfgov.org*.

Als'attire
Hand Made San Francisco
1(415)693-9900
1300 Grant Ave,
San Francisco, CA,
94133
Bring your ideas to life with our designers, and enjoy a timeless experience of hand made garments and shoes.
Handmade@alsattire.com


CITY LIGHTS
BOOKSELLERS & PUBLISHERS
A LITERARY MEETING PLACE SINCE 1953
OPEN DAILY 10am-10pm
261 COLUMBUS AVE SAN FRANCISCO CA 94133 | 415 362 8193
www.citylights.com



MACCHIARINI METALWORKS GALLERY
1544 GRANT AVENUE, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94133
Since 1948 - 75 years as a North Beach Legacy Business!
MetalworksSF Macchiarini Creative Design School of Handcrafted Jewelry and Metal Art
Now Enrolling for the Winter 2026 Session At
www.metalworkssf.com

Phone: 415-398-3181
www.sottomaresf.com
sotto.mare@outlook.com
SOTTO MARE
OYSTERIA & SEAFOOD
"The Best Damn Cioppino!"
Seafood • Pasta • Fish Market • Banquet Room for up to 30 Guests
In San Francisco's "Little Italy"
552 Green Street (between Columbus & Grant)
North Beach, San Francisco, CA 94133

PLANNING & ZONING REPORT

MAYOR'S ZONING PLAN ADVANCED ON A CLOSE PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE

by Nancy Shanahan, Stan Hayes, and Mary Lipian
P&Z@thd.org

THD joined a long list of organizations and individuals testifying at the 10-hour marathon Planning Commission hearing on September 11th, voicing opposition to Mayor Lurie's San Francisco Family Zoning Plan (Mayor's Zoning Plan), co-sponsored by our recently-elected Supervisor, Danny Sauter. As reported in the companion piece by Romalyn Schmaltz elsewhere in this issue, the vote at the end of the evening was 4 to 3, with the Mayor's four appointed Commissioners voting in favor of the Mayor's Zoning Plan.

This article discusses THD's opposition to the Plan and shares the critiques of Commissioners Gilbert Williams and Kathrin Moore, who together with Commissioner Theresa Imperial, voted against it.

Remove North Beach, Telegraph Hill, and the Northern Waterfront from the Mayor's Zoning Plan!

THD's primary concerns are the significant impacts to our neighborhood from the height increases and density decontrols now included in the Mayor's Zoning Plan for major portions of Telegraph Hill, North Beach, and the Northern Waterfront that were **not** a part of the 2022 Housing Element unanimously adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2023.[1] Throughout the lengthy public planning process and environmental review leading up the adoption of the Housing Element by the Board of Supervisors, these areas were never proposed for upzoning nor were they shown on any proposed upzoning maps, themselves predicated on new housing being concentrated on the less dense west side of the City.

But Mayor Lurie's new Zoning Plan shifted the concentration of proposed new development to District 3, intensifying height and density increases in North Beach, Telegraph Hill, and the Northern Waterfront. As shown in the bar charts below, while the approved Housing Element targeted already dense District 3 with **800** net new housing units **by 2031**, the Mayor's Zoning Plan now proposes ***5,900 units***, a stunning ***650% increase***.

These major height and density increases are intended to incentivize private developers to build the ***5,900 new housing units*** in The City's densest neighborhoods, causing significant, long-term impacts on our existing tenants, small businesses, important historic resources, parks and open spaces, and the diverse culture of District 3, resulting in displacement and gentrification.

A letter from THD to the Planning Commission identified major impacts to District 3 neighborhoods not addressed in the City's review of the impacts of the Housing Element, including new threats to existing tenants and rent-controlled housing, new impacts to small businesses and historic resources, new shadow impacts to parks and open spaces in North Beach, and new impacts on the Northern Waterfront. THD's letter also pointed out that the State's mandate to build affordable housing is significantly overstated in the Mayor's Zoning Plan, since it is based on outdated high-growth population projections that no longer apply. THD noted that the State's Department of Finance now forecasts that in 2030, and even in 2050, thousands fewer people will live in San Francisco than in 2020, with THD wondering then why we are letting Sacramento push San Francisco into building 82,000 new units.

Why were North Beach and Telegraph Hill and the Northern Waterfront suddenly included in the Mayor's Zoning Plan? According to individuals in the Planning Department and confirmed by emails obtained through a Sunshine Act request, the addition of these areas was done with the specific approval of Supervisor Danny Sauter who is also a co-sponsor of the Mayor's Zoning Plan.

Notes from the Planning Commission Hearing

Following 10 hours of public comment, 75% of which were in opposition to the Mayor's Zoning Plan, it was time for the Planning Commissioners to have their say. Some of the comments of Board of Supervisors' appointees, Commissioners Gilbert Williams and Kathrin Moore, are shared below.

Commissioner Gilbert Williams

"If our city wants to make permanent changes in our zoning laws changing decades of land use controls that will affect hundreds of thousands of San Franciscans, put tenants and small businesses at risk of displacement, straining public transportation, water and electricity needs, increasing demands on public education systems, and negatively impacting the environment is too broad and too impactful not to be decided by all San Franciscan residents."

Constantly changing zoning maps without community engagement leads to resistance and distrust.

Commissioner Williams acknowledged the many comments he heard from community members concerned about the upzoning maps that have been continuously changing, especially the addition of North Beach and areas in D3. The planning staff failed to answer his question as to who recently added North Beach and Telegraph Hill to the Mayor's Zoning Plan map.

The "affordable housing crisis" is rooted in long-term policy failures, not land use or zoning controls.

Commissioner Williams provided the historical context for today's "affordable housing crisis," revealing that none of it has to do with land use policies or zoning controls. He traced the "housing affordability crisis" back to federal budget cuts by the Reagan administration in the early 1980s, the reduction to zero by 1996 of federal funding for new public housing, the end of redevelopment agencies that funded affordable housing development, and the rise of private equity firms and hedge funds buying millions of foreclosed homes and apartment buildings following the foreclosure crisis of 2008. It is estimated that institutional investors will own 40% of single-family homes nationwide by 2030.

He also pointed out that at the state level, there has been a refusal to abolish the Costa-Hawkins law prohibiting the expansion of rent control and the Ellis Act, allowing landlords to evict tenants and leave the rental market. Over the last two decades, the Ellis Act has been used to evict thousands of San Francisco residents. Commissioner Williams stated that the legalization of short-term rentals, today including 7,300 listings in San Francisco, has also contributed to the loss of affordable housing.

Failure to meet affordable housing goals undermines equity commitments.

Commissioner Williams reminded his fellow Commissioners that the state mandates that 57% of San Francisco's new housing be affordable, yet the proposed plan does nothing to ensure this outcome. This disconnect undermines the Housing Element's commitment to racial and social equity, as affordable housing is key to stabilizing historically marginalized communities.

Mass deregulation without tenant or small business protections, and failure to meet affordable housing goals, while silencing public participation.

"This upzoning plan, aka family zoning plan, is simply mass deregulation being forced through the Housing Element without any tenant protections, no small business protections, doesn't address our Housing Element's requirement for 57% of new housing be affordable. [...] No provisions for residents with disabilities, no protection for our priority equity geographies, and allows demolition of rent-controlled units and buildings with existing small businesses."

Commissioner Williams ended his comments by pointing out to his fellow commissioners that the proposed upzoning plan effectively strips the Planning Commission of its authority by transferring approval powers to the planning director, thereby silencing public participation.[2]

Commissioner Kathrin Moore

"I have focused my own career on being a practicing urban designer, planner, and architect. For that reason, I like to talk about the atypical approach of this particular rezone that is atypical for any large planning effort ever undertaken by this city in the past. This is a city known for its exceptionally crafted, large-scale urban design plans that have attracted worldwide attention with numerous awards and have created the remarkable city that we live in.

"What we are looking at today is not a Plan. It is a document primarily responding to a mandate for numbers, without a vision of what the upzoned city will look like. There's no hint anywhere of what this future city looks like—and there has been no participatory process to shape a vision for what we want our city to look like in the future. We're simply responding to numbers."

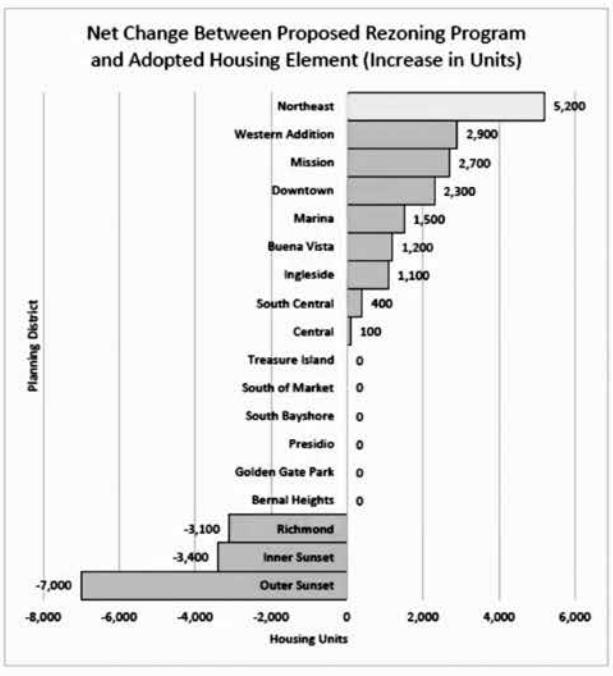
Many critical issues remain unaddressed.

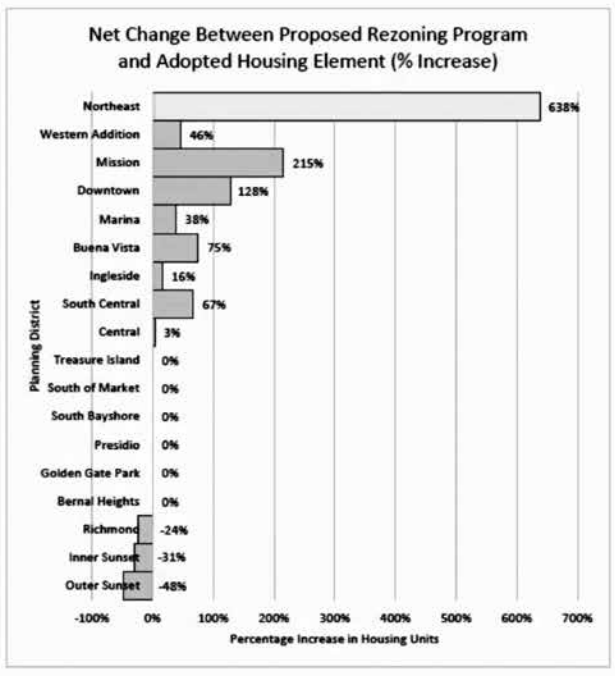
Commissioner Moore highlighted that many critical issues remaining unaddressed, including affordable housing goals, funding plans, tenant protections, historic preservation, and environmental accountability. She underscored the absence of a phasing plan, labor standards, construction sequencing, net-zero initiatives, infrastructure guarantees, transportation planning, and open space commitments. This absence, coupled with confusing and inconsistent policy applications, have eroded public trust in the process.

European cities demonstrate the possibility for urban design success.

Commissioner Moore contrasted the Mayor's Zoning Plan with exemplary urban design success stories from European cities that change and reinvent themselves around the principle of keeping history

continued on next page





Planning & Zoning

cont'd from previous page

alive—preserving the old, using the old as a nucleus for the development of new neighborhoods and city densification. She used Copenhagen as an example to illustrate that it is possible to reconcile housing scarcity and lack of affordable housing with a good mix of residential and commercial areas, with affordability and equity built in, with good architecture, a wide range of different housing options, and a well-designed living environment.

Today, Copenhagen is the most talked about and most recognized example of a successful city in the world. San Francisco used to be one of those cities, and it is Commissioner Moore's expectation that with the proper urban design and planning, San Francisco could recapture some of our famous ranking for the benefit of all.[3]

Thank you to all of the THD members who came out and testified and to the Planning Commissioners who stood up for our neighborhood. We will continue to fight this catastrophic plan that threatens to upend our incredible historic neighborhood.

Notes

1. THD's full letter is available for your review and download at *https://semaphore.thd.org/thd-letter-dated-september-9-2025-opposition-to-proposed-family-zoning-plan-2021-005878-gpa-pca-map-items-14a-14b-and-14c-general-plan-amendments-planning-code-text-amendments-and-zoning-m/*.

2. A YouTube of Commissioner Williams making his comments is available here: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtXyywz9z7U*.

3. A YouTube of Commissioner Moore making her comments is available here: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqxWCzsIPS4*.

SOCIAL & PROGRAMS REPORT

By Greta Alexander and Kim Pendleton, Committee Co-Chairs, Social@thd.org

The Social Committee has been hard at work preparing a lively lineup of events for the final quarter of the year, offering members opportunities to explore, connect, and celebrate together.

One highlight of the Fall calendar is the return of Gary Kamiya, author of *Cool Gray City of Love*. Known for his deep knowledge of San Francisco's history and his engaging storytelling, Kamiya will once again lead two of his always-popular walking tours. On Friday, November 8, he will guide participants through the *Jackson Square Historic District*, a route that also explores portions of Chinatown and the Barbary Coast. The following week, on Friday, November 15, he will turn his focus to *North Beach and Telegraph Hill*. Each tour runs approximately three hours and promises a rich immersion into the city's past. Tickets are $50 per person. Registration details were sent separately.

December brings with it the much-anticipated Holiday Party and Membership Meeting, a festive tradition that marks the start of the holiday season.

A FESTIVE FOURTH QUARTER:
WALKING TOURS, HOLIDAY CHEER, AND JAZZ NIGHTS

On Wednesday, December 17, members will gather in the Wine Cellar of the North Beach Restaurant for an evening of beautifully prepared food, beverages, and holiday cheer. Pricing, timing, and prepayment information will be shared in the coming weeks, but members are encouraged to save the date for this not-to-be-missed celebration.

Looking further ahead, the Social & Programs Committee is also arranging a members' evening at Keys Jazz Bistro, one of the city's premier venues for live music. More details will follow. The event promises to add another vibrant note to the season's calendar.

With history, celebration, and music on the horizon, the months ahead are shaping up to be both festive and memorable.

Advertise in The Semaphore. See page 15.

Addendum No. 1 to Environmental Impact Report
September 2025

Case Nos. 2019-016230ENV, 2021-005878CWP, and 2021-005878GPA
Family Zoning Plan – Housing Element Rezoning Program

Table 3: Comparison of Housing Units between the Adopted Housing Element FEIR and the Proposed Rezoning Program by Planning District

Planning District	Net New Housing Units[a,b]		Net Change between Proposed Rezoning Program and Adopted Housing Element
	Adopted Housing Element in the FEIR[c]	Proposed Rezoning Program	
Bernal Heights	-200	-200	0
Buena Vista	1,600	2,800	1,200
Central	2,900	3,000	100
Downtown	-1,800	500	2,300
Golden Gate Park	0	0	0
Ingleside	6,800	7,900	1,100
Inner Sunset	11,000	7,600	-3,400
Marina	4,200	5,800	1,500
Mission	-1,300	1,500	2,700
Northeast	800	5,900	5,200
Outer Sunset	14,300	7,400	-7,000
Presidio	0	0	0
Richmond	12,400	9,400	-3,100
South Bayshore	-600	-600	0
South Central	-600	-200	400
South of Market	-5,800	-5,800	0
Treasure Island	0	0	0
Western Addition	6,100	8,900	2,800
Total	**50,000**	**54,000**	**4,000**

Source: San Francisco Planning Department, 2021 and 2025.

Notes:

a. Numbers have been rounded and will not sum to the total.

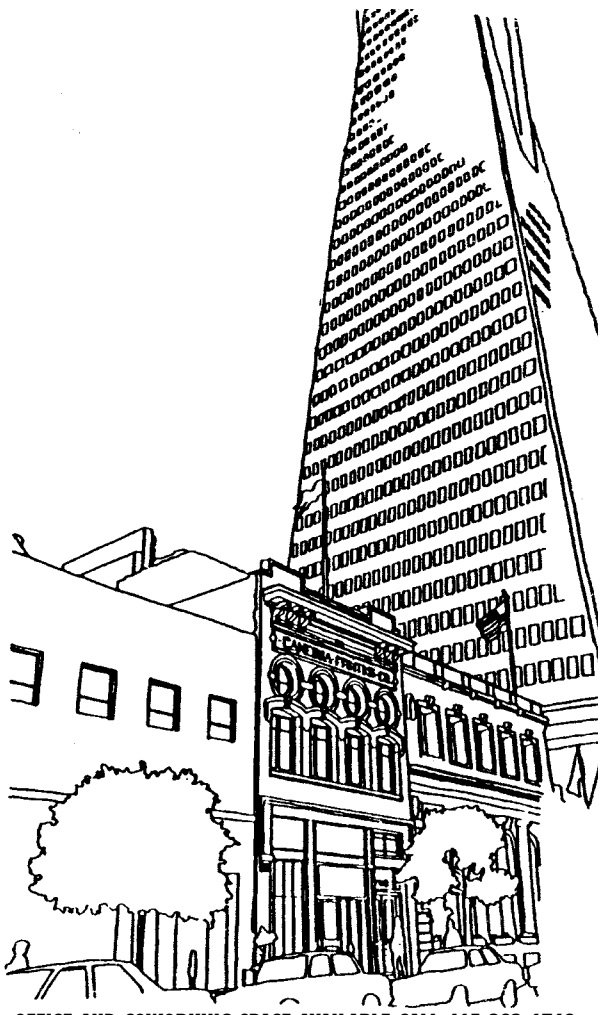
b. The negative numbers in this table indicate that the planning district is anticipated to have fewer new housing units under the adopted housing element or the proposed rezoning program compared to the 2050 environmental baseline. The negative numbers do not indicate that the planning district would lose existing housing units or that any zoning changes would reduce development capacity compared to existing zoning. Rather, these numbers reflect the department's assumptions that because of the proposed rezoning, a certain portion of housing growth would shift away from these districts and to the proposed rezoned area.

c. The net new housing units in the Adopted Housing Element in the FEIR column (i.e., approximately 50,000) are in addition to the housing units that would be constructed under the 2050 environmental baseline. The net new housing units in the Adopted Housing Element in the FEIR column are consistent with the San Francisco County Transportation Authority's San Francisco Chained Activity Modeling Process (SF-CHAMP) travel demand model data used in the FEIR.

San Francisco Planning

19

SHOP SMALL
SM



OFFICE AND COWORKING SPACE AVAILABLE CALL 415 392 1768

TRANSPORTATION REPORT

TRANSIT TEETERING: $$$ FUTURE FUNDING

Text and photos by Howard Wong, AIA, Committee Chair
howard.wong@thd.org

$750 Million: To Loan or Not to Loan

First, of immediate concern: The state legislature's June budget had included an agreement on a transit lifeline loan of $750 million to help Muni, BART, Caltrain, and other transit systems through November 2026, when transit funding measures would appear on the ballot. But the Governor's office appeared to be on the verge of reneging on the loan. Lobbying by Bay Area political leaders reopened negotiations on loan terms in the next months for legislative approval in early 2026. Without confidence in a new funding stream, transit agencies would be forced gradually to reduce service. As federal/state transit relief funds run out, annual structural deficits are looming: Muni $320 million/year; BART $350 million/year; Caltrain $57 million/year. Muni could cut service frequency by 50%, eliminate bus lines, end fare subsidies, and stop service after 9 p.m. BART could cut service by 65%-85% and cut two of its five lines.

Regional Transit Funding Measure: November 2026 Ballot

The passage of California Senate Bill 63 (SB 63) paves the way for a sales tax measure on the November 2026 ballot for five Bay Area counties. If SB 63 is approved, San Francisco could levy an additional sales tax of 1% and Alameda/Contra Costa/San Mateo/Santa Clara an additional 0.5% for a limited 14-year period. New tax revenue would be shared by the San Francisco Metropolitan Transportation Agency (SFMTA-Muni), BART, AC Transit, Caltrain, SF Bay Ferry, and Golden Gate Transit. The measure has proactive language, requiring transit agencies to improve financial efficiency, rider experience, regional transit integration, and implementation of the MTC Transit Transformation Action Plan. The bill creates a five-county special district to enable the regional measure on the ballot, with an option for a voter-initiative process that requires only a simple majority (50% plus one) to pass, rather than two-thirds vote needed for a tax placed on the ballot by a government agency. Even if it is passed, the estimated $1 billion in new annual funding would be insufficient to cover total structural deficits in all regional transit agencies.

San Francisco Parcel Tax Measure: November 20026 Ballot

Augmenting the Regional Transit Funding Measure, San Francisco Mayor Daniel Lurie is proposing a Transit Parcel Tax Measure on the SF ballot, potentially generating $85 million annually to stem further Muni service cuts. A parcel tax is a flat fee charged to property owners, rather than a tax based on a property's value. Specifics regarding the tax rate, exemptions, and structure are in the works. The mayor sees robust transit as key to revitalize downtown. The planned ballot measure will include reforms for Muni accountability and reliability. A parcel tax measure requires two-thirds voter approval.

SFMTA Can't Wait: More Ongoing Budget Cuts

Although transit ridership and workers-in-office are steadily increasing, SFMTA must address current budget shortfalls, implementing new 5%-7% cuts across all divisions. Even if November 2026's ballot measures were to pass, funding would not be available until 2027, and even then, Muni could still have some budget deficits. SFMTA has already enacted efficiencies, delayed projects, cut mid-day service frequencies, trimmed five bus routes, raised fares/fees, frozen hiring, eliminated vacant positions, and laid off top managers. SFMTA will be holding workshops, seeking new funding sources and tolerable cuts.

Regional Transit Agencies Have to Be Proactive: Improve Service

A transit ground-swell of support is growing, but non-transit users and implacable taxpayers need to be engaged. The good news is that a transit advocacy coalition has arisen with diverse people/groups across the political spectrum and region. But the most influential power lies within the capabilities of transit agencies, demonstrating their transit/transportation expertise and innovative managerial skills. Transformative transit can arise from regional transit integration/coordination amongst 27 Bay Area transit agencies and 151 transit-related planners/providers—emulating best transit practices from around the world, design quality, people-oriented service, low-cost fundamentals, and high transit modal share.

TRANSIT TRAVEL TIDBIT: Tuk Tuks are beloved three-wheeled motorized rickshaws, common in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and gaining popularity elsewhere. Named for its engine sound, Tuk Tuks are cultural symbols, offering affordable/efficient door-to-door service and jobs/income for many families. Maneuvering through congested Southeast Asian streets, Tuk Tuks are sympatico with small stores, vendors, carts, and hawkers—a subculture of low-income peoples eking out a living. Bangkok alone has 9,000 registered Tuk Tuks and is adding more—demonstrating that one key to economic vitality is affordable/diverse/low-techy transit, while providing diverse jobs, artistic expression, and unique character to streets.

TRANSIT TRAVEL TIDBIT: New Siem Reap-Angkor International Airport (Cambodia) is a cooperation between Cambodia and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Under a build-operate-transfer agreement, a Chinese company received a concession to finance, design, construct, own, and operate the facility for 55 years, Currently, the airport is underutilized, as tourism waned post-pandemic. As the gateway to the treasured Angkor Wat Temples, Siem Reap does warrant a great airport, striving for 7.5 million international tourists by 2035. Notable is the airport's architecture: simple, elegant, well-detailed, and spatially powerful. For project delivery, build-operate-transfer agreements have benefits—potentially lowering cost/schedule overruns.

TRANSIT TRAVEL TIDBIT: Singapore's Subway System (MRT—Mass Rapid Transit) carries 3.4 million daily riders—with six lines/143 stations covering150 miles—integrated into shopping districts/airport. Noteworthy: design quality, low-cost, cleanliness, safety, reliability, and frequency (2–3-minute peak service intervals and 5-7 minute off-peak). MRT is fully automated—some of world's longest stretches of driverless trains. Ticketing includes contactless credit cards/smartcards. A useful circle route loops Singapore.

TRANSIT TRAVEL TIDBIT: High-Speed Rail Station (Luang Prabang, Laos) is an architectural gem for a small city of 55,000 people—though Luang Prabang is a UNESCO World Heritage Site with traditional Lao architecture, European colonial buildings, and 30 Buddhist temples. Of greater significance is that the station is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Called the New Silk Road, BRI is China's massive infrastructure program, which aims to connect the globe with road/maritime projects. The Luang Prabang Station is part of the Boten-Vientiane Railway, linking Laos, Thailand, and China. Albeit political, China has a trade/economic vision, which is real. The U.S.A. needs a transportation vision too—to compete globally.

MAYOR LURIE'S "FAMILY PLAN"—IS IT RE

by Romalyn Schmaltz

Dispatches from the "Abundance" Rally and Planning Commission Hearing

Polk Street Resident Sarah appeals to renters. PHOTO BY TODD DARLING, NORTH BEACH MEDIA.

Housing activist Fred Sherburn-Zimmer holds a sign in solidarity. PHOTO BY TODD DARLING, NORTH BEACH MEDIA.

District 3 residents and small business owners helped lead a massive and mischievous-serious counterrally disrupting Mayor Daniel Lurie's City Hall press conference on the morning of September 11, where self-described YIMBYs ("Yes in My Back Yard," a real-estate marketing movement) posed and pontificated with the Board of Supervisors' conservative cohort to celebrate the promise of "Abundance" they believe Lurie's deceptively branded "Family Zoning Plan" will bring to them and future San Franciscans more or less like them.

This was to be a kind of proclamation of a new era of prosperity dawning for The City, a "boom loop" of building replacing the "doom loop" predicated by the pandemic. (It's worth noting that both these phrases were born in YIMBY marketing incubators, as were the false dichotomies of YIMBY and NIMBY—"Not in My Back Yard.") But with 75% of the throng raising signs, fists, and voices in protest, the most abundant element of the gathering was not the speakers huddled and centered for the cameras but the collective and thunderous resistance to their hubris.

Originally intended to be a "silent protest" by a citywide network of activists, neighborhood associations, legacy policymakers, and artists, as Mayor Lurie took the mic, shouts of "Liar!" became a deluge from all sides, drowning out his amplified speech and the cries of SF YIMBY's organized supporters.

"You're a stooge—a shill for [State Senator] Scott Wiener!" and other accusations flew at the new Mayor who looked visibly distraught and even confused at being opposed so overwhelmingly. It was as if his months of marketing extreme upzoning weren't convincing his underestimated constituents, and he was left to twist in the winds of blowback, a tiny Narcissus trapped in his handlers' echo chamber.

At one point the Mayor tried to pacify the crowd with a promise: "If I can speak now, then I'll come down there and listen to you." He continued to speak, but he never "came down" or listened to anyone. Safely centered within his supporters, he seemed not to realize that the folks he promised to meet later "down there" had already risen to flank his ranks and raise anti-upzoning signs alongside, behind, and in front of him and all the speakers.

"This is not a family plan" was a common slogan and chant, with many protest posters emblazoned with statistics that reveal Lurie's branding isn't persuading San Francisco's savviest voters. "Mayor Lurie's 'Family Zoning' is actually 75% Studios & 1-Bedrooms" read many signs. And so it is: Inclusion in the zoning is a feeble requirement that 25% of units—condos or rentals—offer two or more bedrooms.

"Another way of putting that is that 75% of the units are for single occupancy," laughed a protester holding a large white sign with red and blue lettering. "Calling that 'family housing' is like calling this white poster blue."

One North Beach protester arrived dressed as a high-rise structure comprising Mission muralist Michale Rios' paintings of high-rises and festooned with banners hawking $10M condos (which some proposed new units will probably cost) and the slogan, "THE RENT IS TOO DAMN LOW"—the latter sentiment having actually been uttered by Housing Action Coalition Executive Director and YIMBY avatar Corey Smith at a January 2024 Planning Commission hearing in which he pleaded, "We need the rents to go back up" for housing to be profitable enough to attract luxury and market-rate developers.

The welcome didn't warm with the day as four District Supervisors—Danny Sauter, Bilal Mahmood, Matt Dorsey, and now-recalled Joel Engardio—aligned with the Mayor's myopic vision took their turns at the mic. Seen frequently with the Mayor in photo-ops and Instagram reels celebrating curb paintings, our District 3 Supervisor Sauter took to the podium only to gaze out on a sea of his own angry constituents, some of whom lampooned him in masks of his likeness.

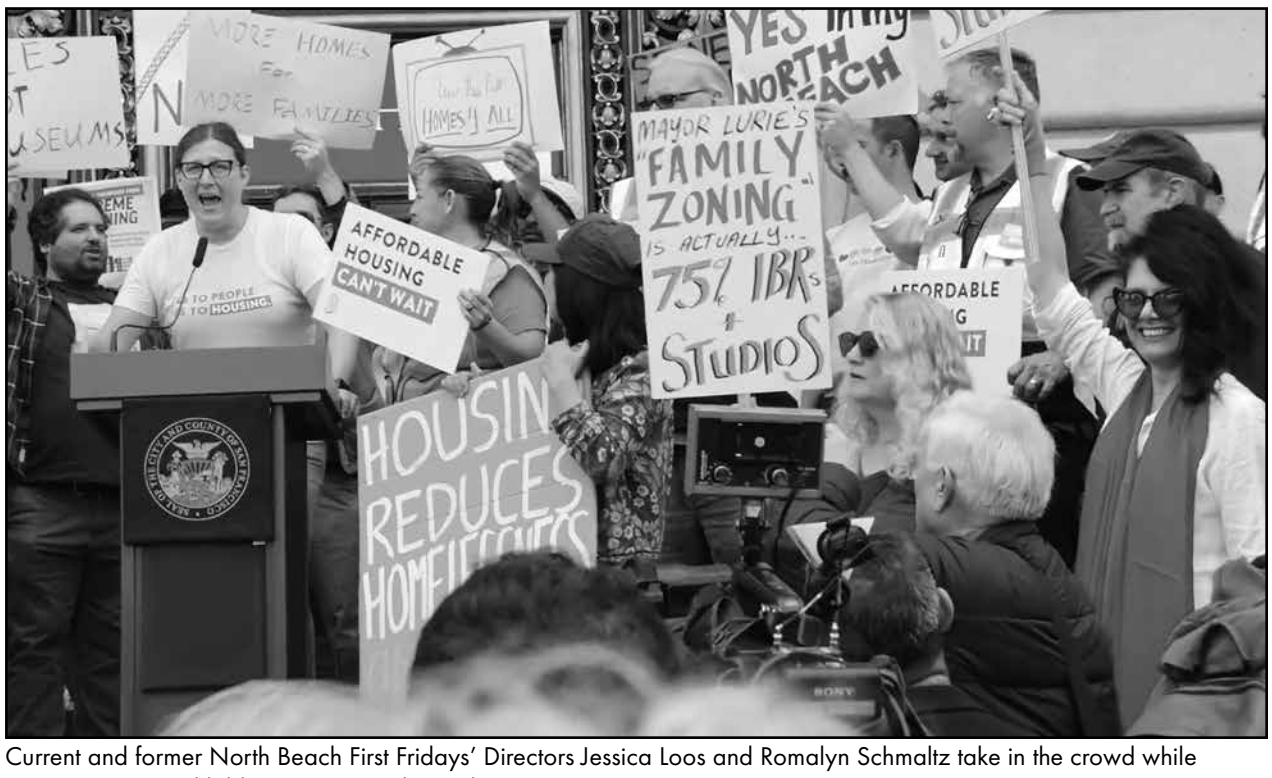
Despite fierce opposition from his home base, Supervisor Sauter has doubled down on his decision to volunteer precious parcels of our district for doubled height limits, even though prior to his taking office, our current zoning in North Beach, Fisherman's Wharf, and Telegraph Hill was not on any map drawn to comply with state mandates. Now—as a direct result of his secretive giveaway of our local controls—Fisherman's Wharf has at least 11 blocks upzoned to 65 feet, and about another 17 blocks on the waterfront allow for condos up to 85 feet tall, or 8-9 stories, more than twice its current limits. Add to that over a dozen upzoned blocks along Columbus Avenue (but not Sauter's block where he lives). Staff defending his decision at a recent town hall assured fuming attendees that "You can't notice that elevation from Coit Tower."

So Team Sauter's conclusion for our concerns about free and fair access to the Bay seems to be if that you don't want to see a wall on the waterfront (and voters keep demonstrating they don't throughout the decades), just move to the top of a 210-foot tower atop a 284-foot hill.

"He volunteered for [State Senator] Wiener's campaigns, he's a techie marketer, and he has no policy experience. What could possibly go wrong for our hen-

Mayor Lurie, YIMBY developers and Supervisors appear upset by mass opposition PHOTO BY TODD DARLING, NORTH BEACH MEDIA.

EALLY FOR FAMILIES? IS IT EVEN A PLAN?


MORE HOMES For MORE FAMILIES
HOMES 4 ALL
MAYOR LURIE'S "FAMILY ZONING" IS ACTUALLY... 75% 1BR's & STUDIOS
AFFORDABLE HOUSING CAN'T WAIT
HOUSIN REDUCES

Current and former North Beach First Fridays' Directors Jessica Loos and Romalyn Schmaltz take in the crowd while YIMBY activist and lobbyist Jane Natoli speaks. Photo by Todd Darling, North Beach Media.

house with a fox like that for supervisor?" hollered one protester in a Scott Wiener mask. "He's giving North Beach Mar-a-Lago Face," referring to the telltale plastic surgery currently favored by MAGA elites.

Things only got worse for The YIMBY show as Sauter passed the microphone to his colleagues on the Board of Supervisors, particularly for Supervisors Dorsey and Engardio, both of whom deciding that going full-Elvis on the tone-deaf bluster was surely the best way to foster communication and consensus between hungry constituents and corporate appetites.

Pantomiming a bulldozer experiencing a heart attack in progress, D6 Supervisor Dorsey briefly turned the wayward presser into comic-book pandemonium as he leaned red-faced into the crowd, ordering hundreds of San Franciscans, terrified for their futures and exercising their First-Amendment rights, to just shut up already.

"No one needs your nonsense!" he scolded protesters, adding that they weren't the "grown-ups in the room" as he rounded out his very adult tantrum with, "Sit down!"

And sit down they did not.

Then came the Supervisor everybody and nobody was waiting for. The one who 2024 supervisorial candidate Sauter cited as the elected official he admired most, and the one who would be recalled just five days after the rally: D4 Supervisor Engardio.

One had to strain to hear much of what Engardio had to say as a chorus of "Recall! Recall!" was chanted loudly against YIMBYs' counter-shouting "Joel! Joel!" At length, he was able to regain some vocal traction with the crowd, only to lie reductively to them that the only thing they had to fear about D4's upzoning amounted to a "five-story building for teachers." His district's most recent map, however, features dozens of blocks now freshly zoned for 85 feet, or eight to nine stories.

D3 Supervisor Danny Sauter gazes out at his angry, protesting constituents. Photo by Todd Darling, North Beach Media.

Recalled Supervisor Joel Engardio delivers his last address as an elected official. Photo by Todd Darling, North Beach Media.

(District 4 responded five days later with an "Outside Landslide"—63% of voters ousted him for putting campaign donors before constituents and ignoring their strong intent to keep the Great Highway open. Engardio put the issue on the 2024 ballot where it was likely to be approved instead of working with the people affected most by his whims, closed the Great Highway to car traffic, created a park his residents didn't want, and now he's out of a job for doing exactly these things.)

"The unemployment line is that way!" pointed one protester to a far-away building.

Following the Supervisor slide deck, the "Abundance" press conference steamrolled along with various YIMBY enthusiasts. Architect Serina Calhoun lamented, "I recently lost an employee because even though I was paying him over $100,000 a year, he still couldn't afford to live in The City" and insisted that market-rate and luxury housing was a boon to low-income communities because wealthier residents would allow poorer families access to better schools. The audience didn't much mourn the loss of her six-figure employee, and they didn't seem to believe her that rich school kids raise all boats in the public education waters.

The Grim Reaper holds a eulogy for the Fillmore as "Scott Wiener" protests next to a high-rise built of high-rises. Photo by Todd Darling, North Beach Media.

Then came Charles Whitfield, chair of the SF Sierra Club that was famously ambushed by ambitious YIMBY astroturfers (activists using environmentalism as a beard for environmental deregulation) several years ago. Whitfield compared his experience in San Francisco to his Texas upbringing, concluding that Lurie's upzoning plan was good for the environment. He argued that bringing tens of thousands of new residents to San Francisco—however lacking in infrastructure—from places like Texas would simply be a matter of "more people enjoying our beautiful weather instead of sitting inside blasting the AC in a 100-degree heat wave" in cities like Houston.

As the press conference fizzled, folks filed into City Hall for what became almost a record marathon. The subsequent 10-hour Planning Commission hearing resulted in hundreds of public speakers, and at the end of the night, around 75% of that public comment was counted as being against Mayor Lurie's "Family Zoning" plan, and the seven Commissioners then took their turns weighing in.

"This is not a plan," began Vice President Commissioner Kathrin Moore. "This is a document responding to a mandate primarily about numbers without a vision for what this upzoned city would look like. It's difficult to say—it hurts, actually." Moore seemed to be heartbroken as she spoke, and if Lurie's upzoning folks were already thin-skinned, she then excoriated them.

"The plan doesn't claim to be an urban design plan. We're going way beyond two or three generations of people who will live with the consequences of this and will not have a say. There is no phasing plan needed to incrementally evaluate this, and there is no construction sequencing plan […] Regarding construction, there is nothing forward-looking or innovative […] There is no physical plan, no three-dimensional visualization. There is no infrastructure plan. There is no transportation plan. There is no open space plan."

"To me it sometimes feels like quicksand. Like when we did the Housing Element, we felt like we had gained solid ground and had the support—as much as you can ever have full support—from the public. It's hard for me […] to justify this massive redistricting and destruction of a functioning city."

Commissioner Gilbert Williams had his own questions, namely *who* put District 3 on the map. When staff refused to admit it was the District 3 Supervisor himself, Williams continued his questions. "Where's the affordable housing? Where's our senior housing? Tenant protections aren't there. There's too much at stake and we're not ready to roll this out. As someone who was born and raised here, I want to go on the record that this plan is not equitable."

Williams concluded by observing an existential threat to the very Commission hearing the case and pleaded with his colleagues. "In addition to not being in compliance with priority planning policies, this plan will essentially render this Planning Commission powerless. I don't know if you guys really understand that. It's taking a lot of our jurisdiction away from us. The public will no longer have the opportunity to voice any concerns over residential development in our city, stripping us of a public right we now have."

Two of his colleagues, Theresa Imperial and Moore agreed and voted against the plan. But despite 75% of the speakers who took the day off and camped out at City Hall being against Lurie's upzoning, the Mayor's four recent appointees carried the plan to a yes vote around 10 p.m. Democracy, it seemed, was not thriving that day.

"In successful, livable cities throughout the world, they change and reinvent themselves around the principle of keeping history alive and using the old as a nucleus for the development of new neighborhoods." Vice President Moore lamented. "San Francisco used to be one of those cities."

Do not despair—declare yourself engaged! The struggle to protect the character, culture, and residents of North Beach, Telegraph Hill, and Fisherman's Wharf continues, and you can meet us in whatever moment we are when you read this and join the community in meaningful resistance. Unfortunate examples like Engardio verify that people power is still *where it's at, and that truth is proving quite uncomfortable for many of San Francisco's elected officials. In a time of radical erosion of democratic norms, insistence on true democracy at the local level is ever more paramount. When we fight, we win.*

WATERFRONT REPORT

WHOSE WATERFRONT?

by Greg Chiampou, Committee Co-Chair
greg.chiampou@thd.org

The Port of San Francisco holds monthly public Advisory Committee and Port Commission meetings, addressing Port land use, leasing, and development projects—topics that can spark spirited public reactions, as they should.

While not comprising a comprehensive list, these are several "heated" topics from recent Port meetings and panels.

Proposed Fisherman's Wharf Revitalization Plan

On October 8, the Port Commission approved a nonbinding term sheet for Fisherman's Wharf Revitalized LLC's (FWR) proposed mixed-use project at Pier 45 Sheds A and C and Seawall Lots 300/301(aka the "Triangle" parking lot). This document outlined the project's deal structure, including lease terms, funding, and the amounts dedicated to infrastructure investment.

The project's developer, FWR, envisions creating several new entertainment, event, dining, and public spaces across the five-acre site. This $548 million project would be the largest investment at the Wharf since 1978's Pier 39 development. Seawall and infrastructure improvements are projected to be major cost components, as shown in "Sources and Use of Funds for the Wharf Redevelopment at Pier 45 and SWL 300/301" below.

Now that the Commission has approved the term sheet, the Port and FWR will next seek the Board of Supervisors' endorsement of this nonbinding term sheet and a finding of fiscal feasibility, the Port stating that these steps will be carried out within the next 12 months.

The Commission meeting's official agenda and the public audience's unofficial one seemed to be at odds: Attendees expected to address—and spoke up about—FWR's project concept itself, whereas the Commission's agenda called for voting on the term sheet, which audience members had not seen previously.

So, let's break this down.

The Port Commission, the Port, and the developers had previously (and privately) already discussed, vetted, and negotiated this nonbinding term sheet by the time of the public session. At the meeting, the Port highlighted, for the Commission's benefit, several of the term sheet's key financial assumptions and requirements, as well as the Port's strategic goals for redeveloping the Wharf. Of most interest to the public was the new disclosure of the project's expected funding.

The presenters stated that of the $401.5 million to be invested in Pier 45, $147 million would be for infrastructure improvements. And, $39 million in infrastructure improvements would be part of the projected $82.6 million to be invested in seawall lots 300/301. By comparison, it would cost an inflation adjusted $632 million in today's dollars to build Oracle (Pac Bell) Park (source: Wikipedia).

Sources and Use of Funds for the Wharf Redevelopment at Pier 45 and SWL 300/301.
Source: 10/8/24 San Francisco Port Commission meeting.

SOURCE	Source Amount		USE	Use Amount
Equity	$294,800,000		Pier 45	$401,500,000
Debt	$239,100,000		SWL 300/301	$ 82,600,000
CFD/IFD*	$ 36,600,000		Other	$ 64,000,000
Other/Credit	$ (22,500,000)			
TOTALS	$548,000,000		TOTALS	$548,000,000

'*Public debt

Approximately 12 citizens, the majority of whom were critical of the FWR project as currently envisioned, then addressed the Commission. Those in opposition identified their ties to the Wharf's fishing industry and/or ownership of nearby businesses. All cited the project's prospective negative impacts on the existing commercial fishing community, particularly the development's plans for Pier 45 (e.g., moving, cramping, and inconveniencing existing fishing equipment storage and staging spaces, congesting their work areas with mall traffic and an 'event space,' impeding fish wholesaler traffic, and forcing them to conduct daily operations in an 'amusement park' atmosphere). Several speakers speculated on the possible demise of the Wharf's commercial fishing, and others questioned whether the proposed project could ever break even given the high hurdle imposed by servicing more than $250 million in debt obligations.

Two citizens affiliated with local businesses spoke in favor of the project. While expressing empathy for the fishing community's shared concerns, they focused on the urgent need for boosting the Pier 45 Wharf area's commercial viability and tourism, obtaining funds for needed infrastructure improvements, and creating additional public benefits.

The Port's stated project's goals for this area of the Wharf include "to promote the fishing industry, its Fisherman's wharf and…preserve the fishing industry and the fishing at the site." As negotiations proceed, the FWR sponsors and Port will need to prove more support for the Wharf's fishing industry so that it does not fade away or leave.

THD's Waterfront Committee has been following FWR's evolving design proposal for the past two years. (See Waterfront Reports in *The Semaphore* Winter 2024 and Summer 2024.) We recently met with the FWR sponsors, offering several significant concerns about the current proposal: the project design's potential negative impact on the Wharf's fishing industries, the inclusion of a 'short-term apartment rental' facility on the waterfront, and the plan to rebuild an expanded former Shed C as an event space, among other concerns.

The Commission responded to the meeting's audience by emphasizing that it was approving a nonbinding term sheet, not the FWR project's final development plan or design. The Commission encouraged audience members to contact their elected Supervisors with their concerns and comments about the project. The term sheet was approved 4:1.

BCDC Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan Proposed Changes

The San Francisco Bay's shoreline accounts for one-third of the state's entire coastline but is projected to shoulder two-thirds of the state's potential economic damage from sea level rise (SLR) risks.

That's according to the newly released Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan draft *(bayadapt.org)* from the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). The plan aims to encourage a collective approach to SLR planning across the nine-county Bay region, rather than a county-by-county process.

BCDC is a powerful authority. Formed in 1965 by the state legislature to protect the Bay Area's estuary coastline, BCDC has the mandate to approve, reject, or modify permitting in its jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay, 100 feet inland of the shoreline, the Suisan Marsh, and many other waterways throughout the nine-county Bay Area.

In developing the Adaptation Plan document, BCDC's aim is to provide "a region-wide plan for the Bay shoreline that guides the creation of coordinated, locally planned sea level rise adaptation actions that work together to achieve regional goals." In addition, the draft Plan provides "guidelines and standards that must be used in subregional shoreline [SLR] adaptation plans as required by SB 272".

THD applauds BCDC's spearheading a regional, collective approach to SLR planning and resilience. Everyone knows that rising sea water must go somewhere, and it would be self-defeating for one Bay Area city to erect, say, a tall seawall while the neighboring town's newly developed estuary is then overloaded by runoff from the wall. BCDC is well positioned to support (and enforce) a regionally coordinated approach to SLR resilience planning, which is most certainly needed.

Proposed Amendments to BCDC's "San Francisco Bay Plan"

There are laws, rules, and regulations, and then there are also amendments!

BCDC, in partnership with the Port, is proposing to loosen the state's McAteer-Petris Act's restrictions on waterfront development at the Wharf and the Exploratorium via two amendments to the Plan. Originally devised in 1968 in response to the McAteer-Petris Act, BCDC's plan is a comprehensive (and voluminous) guide for assessing or approving new development on the Bay and its shoreline.

The two proposed amendments are: 1) Allow the Port and the Exploratorium to set aside its original obligations to remove pre-existing landfill, and, in exchange, the Exploratorium will implement SLR public education programming; and (2) Loosen the McAteer-Petris Act's "50%" regulation at Fisherman's Wharf.

As background, the state's 1965 McAteer-Petris Act sought to protect and reclaim California's waterfront from over-commercialization and landfill. Among the Act's requirements are that any reconstructed or replacement piers can only be replaced with piers that are half the original size, with the other 50% of the space either being removed or dedicated to public benefit and access purposes. BCDC and the Port are looking to loosen the 50% rule for "Special Areas" of the Port's Wharf waterfront.

BCDC and the Port maintain that rehabilitating and repairing some of the dilapidated Wharf piers and pilings is often economically infeasible if the McAteer-Petris Act's 50% restrictions are enforced. For example, the pilings and landfill underneath the former Alioto's restaurant need repair, yet the "50% rule" would significantly reduce that area's future commercial space and thereby prevent attracting the amount of capital needed for repairs.

There is a different rationale for the amendment to loosen the McAteer-Petris Act's restrictions at the Exploratorium. As part of its original 2013 permitting, the Exploratorium received an exception to the McAteer-Petris Act's regulations. It did not have to remove the deck and pilings that form the "valley" between its location at Pier 15 and Pier 17, nor eliminate non-historic additions to the sheds at those piers. This exception was originally negotiated by BCDC and the Port, and, as part of the negotiation, the Port was required to conduct fill removal at a different location. The Port now wants relief from this fill removal obligation and requests the amendment.

Audiences at both the Port's Northern and

NORTH BEACH CITIZENS
Hope.
Compassion.
Generosity.
northbeachcitizens.org
1034 Kearny Street
San Francisco, CA 94133
415-772-0918

Fisherman's Wharf Advisory Committee meetings did not object to either proposed amendment. But they pointed out that SLR programming might ordinarily be considered part of the Exploratorium's core responsibility and not as a bargaining chip. Furthermore, attendees were left with the understanding that future repair of existing Wharf piers and landfill would maintain their current commercial space size (not be enlarged just because the "50% rule" was loosened).

Embarcadero Enhancement Pedestrian Safety and Bikeway Paths

What is the SFMTA's (and, as well, the Port's) concomitant responsibility to ensure pedestrian safety protocols when it rolls out more and expanded bikeway paths?

The SFMTA, in partnership with the San Francisco Port, recently presented one of its latest "Embarcadero Enhancement" program initiatives: Doubling the length of the two-way protected bikeway path, extending it from Folsom to Harrison Streets and now on to Brannan Street on the Embarcadero's waterside. This protected bikeway extension requires the trade-off of narrowing the Embarcadero's existing street median (where Muni operates) and removing 15 palm trees to make room for the pathway enhancements.

SFMTA states that the existing width of vehicle lanes and the promenade will be preserved and replacement palms will be planted in the bikeway's buffer zone, but that 14 to19 metered parking spaces will be affected.

Protecting bikers or 'wheelers' on city streets is needed, no question, particularly since the recent proliferation of many types of 'wheelers.' ('Wheelers' is a general term encompassing bicycles as well as all types of electric bikes, motorized skateboards, and scooters but excluding automobiles.) Attendees at a recent Advisory Committee meeting were concerned that expanding bikeway paths for wheelers should not come at the potential expense of pedestrian (or driver) safety.

The City's Vision Zero program has identified the central Embarcadero roadway and environs as among the City's most dangerous pedestrian and traffic zones. Multiple Advisory Committee attendees responded to the expanded Embarcadero bikeway path plan by sharing their experiences with near-misses and intimidation from aggressive 'wheelers' on the Embarcadero's roadway and sidewalks, whether from motorized wheeler scofflaws operating on the Embarcadero promenade (despite an existing bikeway path) or while trying to cross at a "Walk" light.

SFMTA says it is aware of safety issues for non-wheelers on the Embarcadero, but it cannot realistically police wheeler traffic. SFMTA deploys engineering solutions when feasible, including raised waiting platforms at key pedestrian crossings such as at the Ferry Building, and implements striped crosswalks and traffic signage. Increasing both the number and size of the city's bikeway paths fits the SFMTA's stated intentions to support multi-modal forms of transportation.

San Francisco has long been a city that experiments with new transportation modes—from the historical novelty of cable cars scaling our city's steep curving hills to the City's recent testing grounds for driverless ride-hail vehicles. With the recent proliferation of both the number and types of wheelers, can San Francisco instill a more respectful and safer "urban wheeler" culture, as observed in foreign cities like Copenhagen?

These four topics have a common thread: The Bay's seawall and its immediate environs. The Port's Advisory Committee and Commission meetings are open to the public, both in-person and online. (See *sfport.com/calendar.)* We hope you will join us at these meetings and help prevent any "tragedy of the commons." Let us know of your interests at *Waterfront@THD.org.*

BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2025

by Mary Lipian, Recording Secretary
mary.lipian@thd.org

July 2025

John Doxey, Chair of the THD Oral History Project, shared with the Board his background, having worked on the project since 2019. Recent oral history interviews have been completed with Carmen and Agostino Crotti and with Howard Wong. The oral histories were originally audio-only but are now video. It typically takes eight months to complete a single video oral history, as they involve research, collection of photos, pre-meetings, the video session, and editing. THD is working to make them accessible online on the THD website. The Board thanked John Doxey and Al Fontes for their work on the oral history project, recognizing how unusual it is for a neighborhood organization to produce these special interviews.

The Board considered the release of a new, even more extreme, massive neighborhood upzoning map. THD had previously offered public comment with objections to the last upzoning plan. The proposed plan encourages severe displacement. THD, along with five other organizations, signed a letter to Supervisor Danny Sauter with concerns regarding the plan. A District 3 Upzoning Education Forum, with 180 attendees, took place on June 23rd at Club Fugazi. A second District forum is scheduled for July 21st. The Board recognized the need to create materials informing people of the potential impacts.

In addition to delays in scheduling the nomination of North Beach to the National Register of Historic Places, all historic district nominations in the entire state have been postponed and/or not scheduled for consideration by the State Historical Resources Commission, with no explanation. THD plans to make a public records request to the State's Office of Preservation. This has become an issue of due process.

Supervisor Danny Sauter introduced legislation removing the North Beach Special Use District and loosening North Beach Neighborhood Commercial District controls, including size limits that protect small business. The Board discussed concerns that the proposed legislation allows for larger storefronts, including combining storefronts into bigger spaces.

THD will hold a New Member Happy Hour on July 23rd at the Steps of Rome. There will be a no-host bar for the event, and it will be an opportunity for new members to meet fellow new members and THD Board Members and learn how they can get involved in the organization.

August 2025

Due to the summer recess, no meeting was held during the month of August.

September 2025

Stuart Watts, president of the North Beach Business Association, presented a proposal to make North Beach the 14th Entertainment Zone in San Francisco. The Entertainment Zone would allow individuals to drink alcohol outdoors in designated areas of the neighborhood. The Board stressed the importance of ensuring a good cleanup plan if a new Entertainment Zone were to be added.

THD Board members met with Supervisor Sauter to discuss his proposed changes to the North Beach Neighborhood Commercial District legislation and sent a letter, urging him to retain the prohibition on storefront mergers and to oppose the amendments that would allow such mergers without a conditional use authorization. The board hopes to continue working with Supervisor Sauter on this evolving legislation.

The Planning Commission will vote on Mayor Lurie's upzoning plan, which now includes significant portions of North Beach, Telegraph Hill, and the Northern Waterfront, on September 11th at City Hall. The Board discussed the importance of having THD members attend the hearing to express their opinions and be heard. THD is opposed to the upzoning plan that would redevelop most of the city while failing to provide protections for existing rent-controlled housing, residential tenants, small businesses, and our architectural and cultural heritage.

The Board provided support for Supervisor Connie Chan's Resolution opposing Senator Wiener's SB 79, which proposes upzoning surrounding all transit corridors. The bill is a massive state-mandated upzoning plan that would eliminate years of local planning and community efforts across San Francisco. It would lead to demolition and displacement of rent-controlled housing and longtime residents.

THD is monitoring the Fisherman's Wharf redesign. The Port announced that the Fisherman's Wharf Forward project would proceed with the construction of a new public plaza in the location of the former Alioto's Restaurant.

WALK A MILE...

by Patricia Cady

✦ ✦ ✦ And take someone with you, a friend or neighbor sidelined by an infirmity or age who has a new respect for gravity. I mean the former go-for-its who had their pet treks up and down Telegraph Hill. Until something, like an ankle or a muscle, went rogue.

New shoes might not help. Nor will you be motivated to count your steps which is like wondering how many purrs there are in a cat. So you're stuck with the truth about purring and walking—every cat is different.

Had there been a contest, I'd have voted for myself—for a while. Pride and pain took me to Walgreens, then to a medical pro for the unwanted advice to slow down. Reluctantly, I did.

I remember that I'd often see an older woman at her window looking out as if she'd like to come with me. To this day, I regret that I never thought to invite her. She could have grabbed a cane if she used one, and certainly one of my arms.

Oh, and bring your library card, just in case.

MEET THE FILMMAKERS OF *FREE FOR ALL: THE PUBLIC LIBRARY*

by Kathi Wheater

"Our apartment building on Fielding Alley is a 'Macondray Lane' kind of thing, right out of Armistead Maupin's novel, Tales of the City. We lived in the same building with North Beach community leader Gerry Crowley for many years, who inspired us with her commitment to the importance of the public commons in our neighborhood. Our upstairs neighbor Susan Hughes told us about the library that we feature in Wisconsin, because she's from a little farming community there. So, we had a real building brainstorm going on."

Dawn Logsdon and Lucie Faulknor, producing and life partners, are reminiscing about the first days of imagining, 11 years ago, what would become their feature-length documentary film *FREE FOR ALL: The Public Library*. The 84-minute film tells the extraordinary story of how a simple idea shaped a nation and the quiet revolutionaries who made it happen.

Dawn Logsdon grew up in New Orleans and had visited about 100 public libraries during summer road trips with her teacher parents before she was a teen. San Francisco native Lucie Faulknor found the library a refuge from the chaos of a house shared with six older siblings. Both women loved libraries but didn't know the history.

Want to defend democracy? Start with your public library.

The public library's founding principle is breathtaking: Build a place where anyone can enter, free of charge, and encounter a universe of ideas. Today that principle is under assault. *FREE FOR ALL* serves as an urgent call to save public libraries from ongoing efforts to limit their programming, censor their books, cut taxes that support them, and, in some cases, shut their doors permanently.

Co-directed by Dawn (also producer, editor, and narrator) and Lucie (producer and co-director), *FREE FOR ALL* is a persuasive, clear-eyed love letter to the public library system. With one of America's most beloved institutions in the "center of the storm politically," Dawn and Lucie are on a mission to spark a national dialogue about the future of our public libraries.

The film was nationally broadcast as part of the PBS *Independent Lens* series at the end of April and is available to PBS members through PBS Passport, a membership benefit when one contributes a gift of $5 per month or an annual gift of $60 or more. That donation will help KQED continue to serve our community through media that educates, inspires, and entertains.

The Independent Television Service, which presents *Independent Lens*, offered a shorter version of *FREE FOR ALL* to screen in libraries and community centers. "They were expecting 30 to 40 screening requests," Lucie enthuses, "and *FREE FOR ALL* blew that out of the water with more than 500 requests."

The filmmakers are continuing community screening events, a unifier for library lovers across the country. Peter Host, Alaska Public Media's Director of Development, is one of many in small communities that hosts the film, saying, "I would love to urge people to not take services like this for granted just because in their lifetime, it's always been there."

"My hope is that *Free for All* can help to bridge political divides, as libraries are important to a vast majority of people," Dawn explains. She hopes the film connects with librarians, people of all ages and political identities, and those who have drifted away from libraries. "We want to preach to the choir because we need them to lift their voices up, but we want to go beyond the choir as well to possibly get new members," Lucie agrees. "Not to say I'm a recruiter or anything, but I feel like it's important for people to see these public libraries as our spaces. We pay for them. We have paid for them for the last 150 years."

The film sets out as a nostalgic memoir.

Dawn's narration opens the film, explaining why and how, as a child, her parents took her on road trips across the U.S.—always stopping at local libraries along the way. Cut to the filmmakers' present journeys around the country to libraries large and small, grandiose and humble, thriving and imperiled. And at each stop, a focus on individual libraries, librarians, and everyday patrons.

In juxtaposing two revolutionary moments: the original "Library Movement" that swept the country in the late 19th century and the current 21st century struggle to keep public libraries flourishing and relevant in the digital age, we learn how those facilities bring people together in ways that few other places seem to do anymore, revealing our libraries as a precious legacy to each generation, offering the heritage of the past and the promise of the future.

Viewing never-before-seen archival imagery, animation, and a visually stunning mosaic of stories, we rediscover the lost voices of generations of impassioned library pioneers—especially women—who helped forge the public library's starring role in our democracy.

Free For All, in essence, is a continuation of Dawn's journey. For over a decade, she and Lucie have been recording what happens at public libraries and noticing along the way how they have gone, "from being America's most trusted and least controversial institution to a battle ground in the growing culture wars."

Why? It's the sort of question you could turn to the books in a library to answer. The documentary presents a compelling story of public libraries then and now, warts and all.

Lucie and Dawn squeezed a lot into the film's 84 minutes. Sure, many know Benjamin Franklin founded the first lending library in the United States, but how many know Lutie Stearns? A librarian, she traveled by sleigh to bring books to readers in remote, snowy Wisconsin.

"Learning from history, it was amazing to find out that it was basically women all over the country who championed libraries," Lucie says. "The way they would go out on horseback to deliver books in the middle of nowhere was fascinating."

One woman given a lot of airtime and due credit is Ernestine Rose, who arrived in New York City in 1904 as a newly-trained librarian. The city and its inhabitants thrilled her—but also made her wonder how she could best serve such a diverse, and largely illiterate, immigrant population. This is just one of the stories. *FREE FOR ALL* tells many, many more.

Stranded and saved by library "first responders"

The idea for *Free for All* was born in 2005 when Dawn and Lucie were stranded in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, due to Hurricane Katrina. They had been finishing their previous film, *The Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans* and were scrambling to find a way to call their families. The Baton Rouge Public Library was a gathering place where people could access the internet, get a helping hand, and sign up for Red Cross aid and FEMA loans.

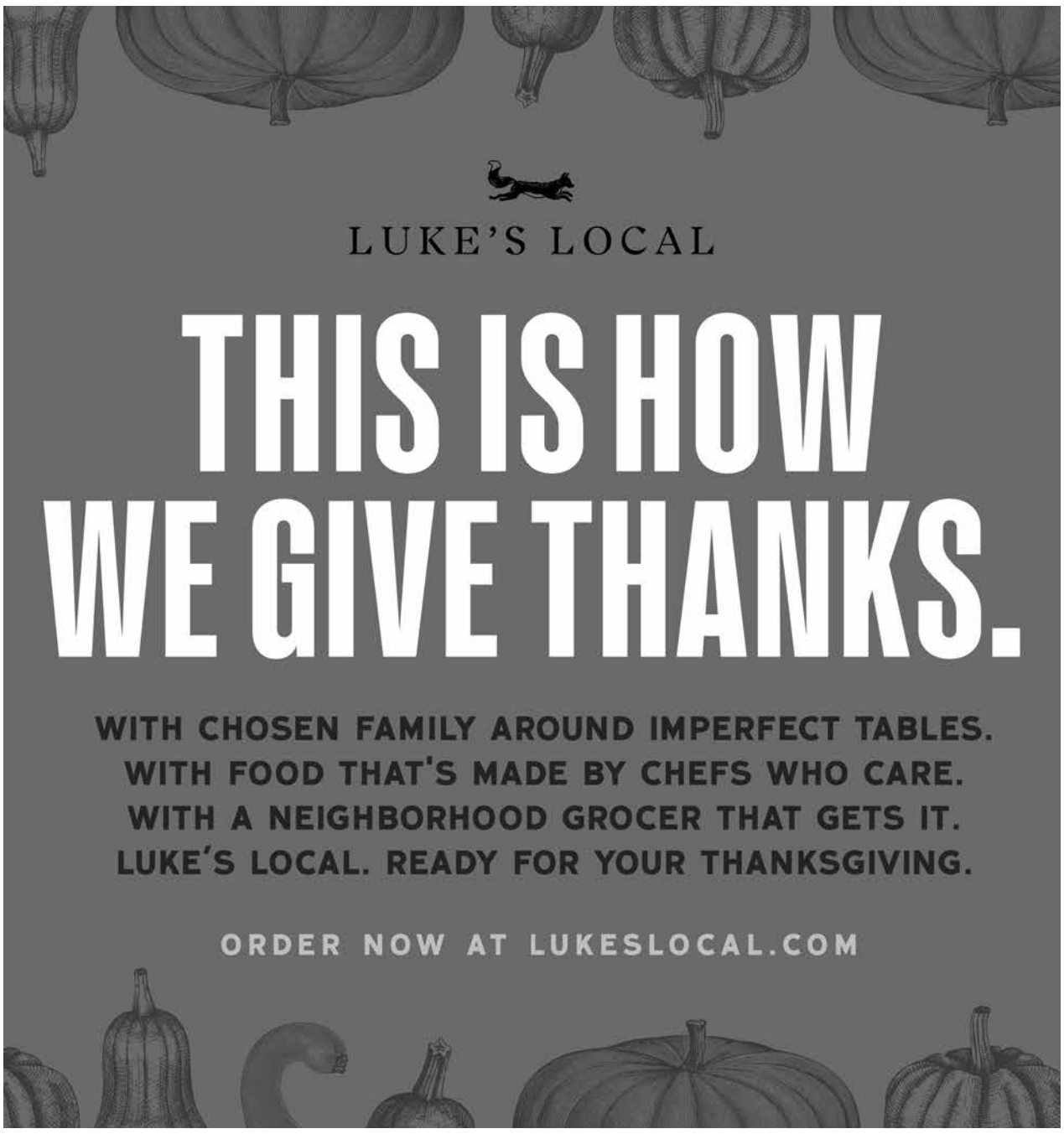
"It was just amazing," Lucie recalls. "They're first responders. I had no idea librarians were first responders." The 2008 financial crisis added urgency when libraries across the country were closing. Lucie said she told Dawn, "We have to do something." "When we started this project, we didn't grasp the urgency fully," Dawn adds, "and neither did people that we went to for funding. It is urgent now."

Do you remember the first time you stepped inside a library?

Originally focusing their film on a day in San Francisco's Main Library, Dawn and Lucie discovered that "The San Francisco library system is one of the best systems in the world right now and the most innovative in the country." The Friends of San Francisco Library fought for decades to ensure stable library funding and asked voters to create the Library Preservation Fund (LPF) in 1994. The LPF has resulted in a 174% increase in the San Francisco Public Library's budget and powered its evolution into a nationally recognized urban public library.

The filmmakers soon learned, however, that while San Francisco's library system was well funded, small-town libraries were facing great threats—"Everybody was telling us that libraries were obsolete and weren't needed anymore and that the paper book was on its way out."

In the film, viewers see a sign displayed at the Myrtle Creek branch library, informing patrons that the last open day will be March 30, 2017. As local news outlets reported in 2019, following the closures, library lovers in the region "have fought, wrangled and


LUKE'S LOCAL
THIS IS HOW
WE GIVE THANKS.
WITH CHOSEN FAMILY AROUND IMPERFECT TABLES.
WITH FOOD THAT'S MADE BY CHEFS WHO CARE.
WITH A NEIGHBORHOOD GROCER THAT GETS IT.
LUKE'S LOCAL. READY FOR YOUR THANKSGIVING.
ORDER NOW AT LUKESLOCAL.COM

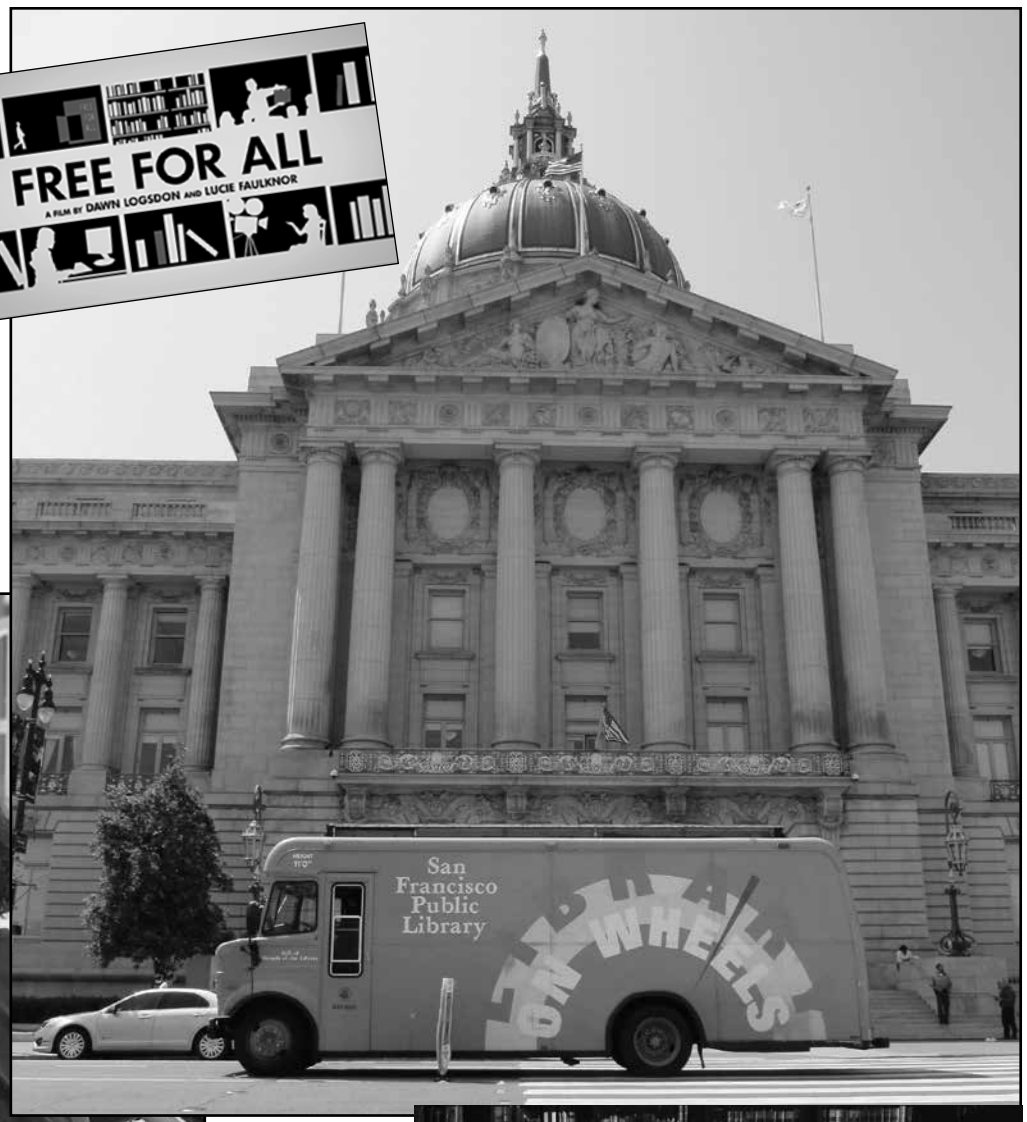
CHECK IT OUT

FREE FOR ALL: The Public Library

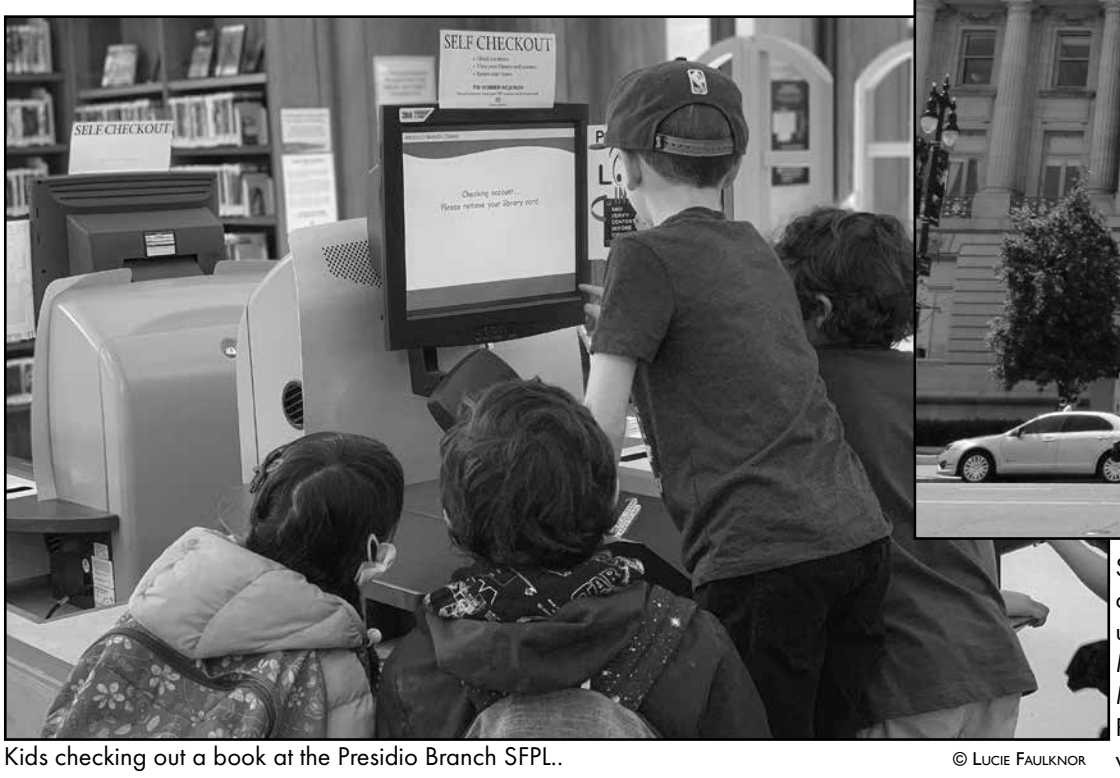
Free Community Film Screening
Telegraph Hill Dwellers, in partnership with The Savoy Tivoli, will host a free film screening with Q&A following with Lucie Faulknor, Producer and Co-Director.

Sunday, November 9 at 3 p.m.
Savoy Tivoli, 1434 Grant Avenue, SF

Home viewing is available to PBS Passport members at *PBS.org*. For info on hosting a community screening, go to *freeforallfilms.org*.



SF Bookmobile outside SFPL main under the Pioneer Monument with Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom and war looking on.
© Lucie Faulknor



Kids checking out a book at the Presidio Branch SFPL..
© Lucie Faulknor

Special reading room, Boston Public Library.
© Lucie Faulknor

A crowd of people waiting for the SFPL Main library to open.
© Anita Bowen.jpg

Dawn and Lucie, taken in Krausgrill Alley (in North Beach).
© Najim Joe Hakim

MEET THE FILMMAKERS *continued*

inspired to launch a grass-roots effort to help re-open the doors. Small but growing armies of volunteers have worked to rebuild collection catalogs, staff reference desks, and run summer reading programs for kids."

"Nine of the 11 closed libraries are now back up and running in a rural DIY fashion," The *Oregonian/OregonLive* reported. "Roseburg, home to what was once the county's largest library, will begin checking out books and providing free internet access this fall."

A Pivot in the Film, A Focus for the Future

"Right before the pandemic lockdown, we thought we had finished the film," Dawn remembers, "and because all the libraries were closed, we had a delay in getting our high-resolution archival images." (The film includes more than 700 archival clips and photos, including at least one visual from every state.) During that delay, the filmmakers decided to start shooting and editing again to cover what was happening to public spaces during the pandemic and then what started happening to them afterwards.

"Did you know that in San Francisco, librarians were repurposed during the COVID pandemic?" Lucie asks. "They didn't lay them off. The city repurposed them and had a lot of them doing contact tracing."

Dawn recalls that "One of our characters, Elizabeth, a librarian in Seymour Wisconsin, is so passionate and so loving towards all her little kids. She was trying to navigate getting storytime online. And she started crying. That was really moving to me. She wasn't crying because of censorship or anything. It was just that she missed her kids and wanted to find a way to help everybody from feeling really isolated."

"That's also when a focus on our endangered public commons really came to the fore as censorship and book-banning gained steam," Lucie remembers. "We saw that some Proud Boys went into the San Lorenzo Public Library in 2022 when there was a drag queen story hour, terrorizing these poor little kids who just wanted to hear a little story with somebody in a costume, you know, who happened to be dressed like a woman. I mean, that was pretty scary for a lot of people."

The film shows heated demonstrations, with community members calling for books dealing with themes such as LGBTQ+ issues to be pulled from the shelves, as librarians make the case that their role is to provide information, not to act as parents.

"Public libraries have a complicated history with many dark chapters that we didn't want to whitewash over," Dawn emphasizes. "All the things that trouble our nation are in this story and, in many ways, the challenges of the past are repeating. Yet the history of public libraries is also one of the great American stories. It's brimming with patriotism and hope and useful lessons for today on how to build a movement for change."

Despite the headline-generating topics, *FREE FOR ALL* ends on a positive note, pointing out that, just as pioneers from decades ago worked to shape the public library, efforts continue to create libraries that will meet the needs of those who use them today, underscoring the fact that these institutions are crucial for a healthy, democratic society.

A line in the film's narration says it all: "In most books, there's a hero of the story. But in the story of the public library itself, there isn't one hero—There's a valiant movement with thousands of unsung heroes fighting to create and keep American libraries FREE FOR ALL."

RESTAURANT NEWS

Read about Steven Listisen and his friends' experience when they finally got to dine at the legendary Cafe Jacqueline. Do you have a favorite restaurant you'd like reviewed? Email us at *semaphore@thd.org*.

—Cap Caplan, Editor

CAFE JACQUELINE

by Stephen Listisen

After three years of trying and failing to score a reservation, it had to be kismet when two of my best friends excitedly texted me in April that they had gotten a highly coveted Cafe Jacqueline reservation...albeit for the second week of August. I'm happy to report that, even with the hype that exists for the restaurant among locals, Cafe Jacqueline provided one of the best, most distinctive overall dining experiences I've ever had.

The reservation—5:30 p.m. on a Tuesday—fell squarely within the time that most San Franciscans are wrapping up their workday or commuting home from work, requiring my friends and me (not known for our timeliness) to feign doctor's appointments and other vaguely described "prior commitments" to ensure we made our reservation. However, I would be remiss if I did not give my friends due credit for their persistence in making the long-sought reservation. After half a dozen phone calls, voicemails, and visits to the restaurant itself later, they secured our spot at Cafe Jacqueline. This was no less than a Herculean feat for a couple of Gen Z-ers, a group known for both hating talking on the phone and laziness.

Needless to say, upon arrival at Cafe Jacqueline, we were more than ready for our meal. Cafe Jacqueline's menu, focused on French fare, offers a few options for appetizers, soups, and salads, before presenting the "main event": a selection of both savory and sweet souffles, made by no other than Cafe Jaqueline's chef and namesake, Jacqueline Margulis. Though my group was initially set on only ordering them, we opted to share a bowl of onion soup before settling on which to indulge. The soup, piping hot, hearty, and delicious, was a perfect precursor for the souffles we would soon devour (but not too soon—each souffle is made to order and might arrive 40-60+ minutes after ordering).

After a few minutes of lively debate, my group settled on ordering two savory souffles, one spinach and one lobster. Both souffles were done just right and packed with unique flavor, speaking to the fact that they were baked with deep experience. Cafe Jacqueline has been operating for more than 46 years and, more importantly, with passion. The souffles were so satisfying without feeling heavy, I almost questioned if it was necessary to order dessert. However, given the elusiveness making a Cafe Jacqueline reservation, my friends and I decided to "lock in" and order two souffles for dessert. One chocolate souffle and one seasonal (peach) souffle later, I was thoroughly satisfied, though unsure if I'd be able to make the climb up Grant Avenue back to my apartment. For me, the dessert souffles were the stars of the show—soft, rich (without being overpowering) and cooked to perfection—a fitting ending to a restaurant experience unlike any other I've had.

If the descriptions of the food, reputation, and exclusivity aren't enough to motivate you to make a reservation at Cafe Jacqueline, one favorite part of my visit there was the ambiance. The slow-paced dinner amongst only eight or nine other tables of diners was a more-than-welcome reprieve from the daily grind of the city. On top of that, what other restaurant has a restroom that requires you to pass through the kitchen of a local culinary legend? Cafe Jacqueline is worth however many calls are necessary to make a reservation.

Cafe Jacqueline
1454 Grant Avenue
Open Tuesday through Saturday: 5:30 to 10:00 p.m.

INTRODUCING NEW BOARD MEMBER

SARAH GOLDSMITH

Influenced by a fortune cookie and *Tales of the City*, I moved to San Francisco in 2020. Frustrated with my life in Philly during the pandemic, I packed my pug and headed for the Golden Gate, a city I had never visited but trusted to be the liberated metropolis I needed. My bet on The Bay paid off—I found meaningful work, joined a community, and fell head over heels for North Beach.

I am passionate about how we convene our community through events and how we advocate for our neighborhood in this moment of deregulation and rising inequity across our city. I've deeply enjoyed connecting with neighbors over upzoning, whether it's through community forums, giving public comment at City Hall, or just chatting in line at Molinari's.

I work as a program manager in the nonprofit sector and am excited to use my project management skills as a board member. My partner Matt and I live on Vallejo Street with our pug-mix Reggie. Please say hello if you see us on a walk!

TREASURER'S REPORT

by Nick Ferris

As we approach the end of the calendar year, it's a great time to consider supporting THD with a year-end donation. Your contributions help sustain our work to preserve and enhance the unique character of our neighborhood.

As many readers know, THD strives for a break-even annual budget. This means we aim to spend about what we raise each year. As of this writing, we are only a few hundred dollars in the red, a normal fluctuation due to monthly cash flow. Overall, we remain on track to meet our goal.

Our membership remains strong, but we are always eager to welcome new members. Please encourage your friends and neighbors to join. Membership dues are our primary source of revenue and directly fund our community programs and advocacy.

Our second-largest source of income comes from advertising. We recently expanded opportunities beyond our flagship *Semaphore* print publication to include our new online *Semaphore*, which has been well received by local businesses.

In addition to our own fundraising, THD continues to collaborate with partner nonprofits and neighborhood organizations to make the most of our shared resources. Through these partnerships, we recently benefited from a generous $3,000 donation from Francesco Covucci of North Beach Restaurant, for which we are deeply grateful.

Thank you to everyone who continues to support THD through your membership, volunteerism, and donations; it truly makes a difference in sustaining our mission.

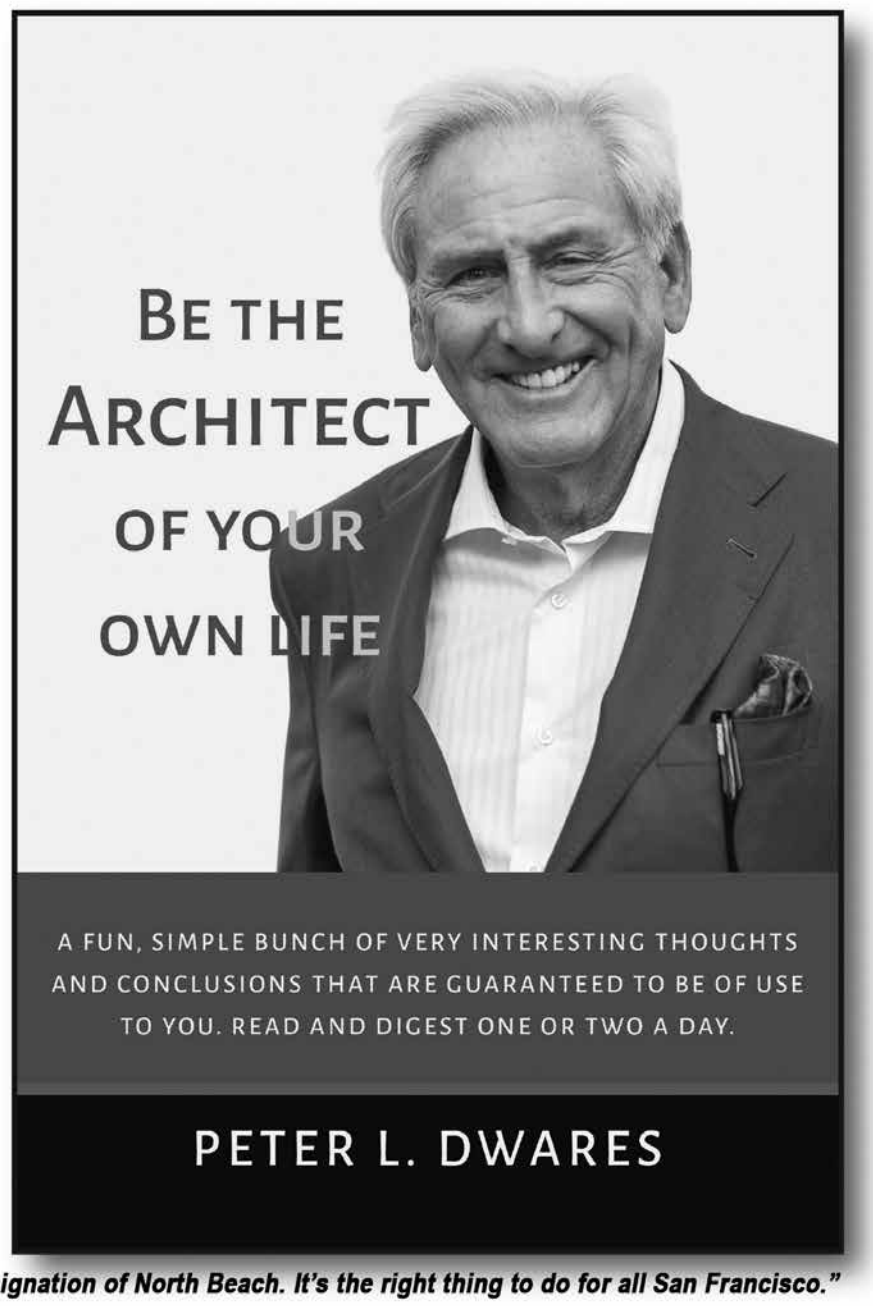
"I have been enjoying countless passages in Peter Dwares informative, funny, page turner "Be the Architect of Your Own Life".

"A philosophy for people who want to excel in business or just live better. "Filled with wisdom and fun."

"Be the Architect of Your Own Life is one of the best self help books I've read."

"Peter Dwares is a Renaissance Man of the first order. Successful real estate developer, author, Founder of Pathways for Kids, especially interested in international issues, thoughtful, engaged."

Available at
pldwares@aol.com
or call 415.986.5885
$15 per book
All profits go to
Pathways For Kids
501 (c) (3)

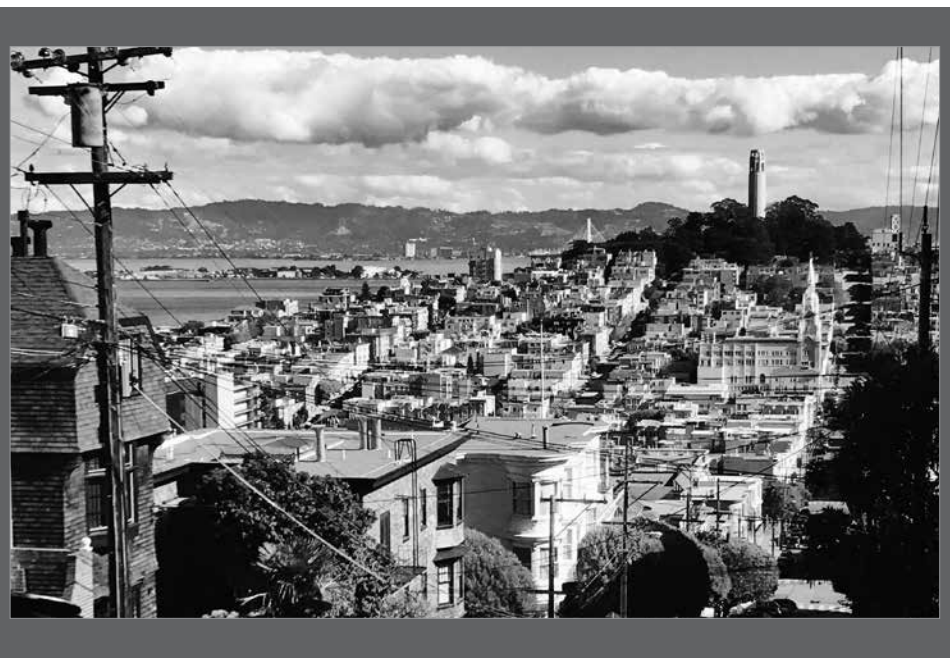

BE THE
ARCHITECT
OF YOUR
OWN LIFE
A FUN, SIMPLE BUNCH OF VERY INTERESTING THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS THAT ARE GUARANTEED TO BE OF USE TO YOU. READ AND DIGEST ONE OR TWO A DAY.
PETER L. DWARES

"I support the Historical Designation of North Beach. It's the right thing to do for all San Francisco."

Advertise in The Semaphore.

Reach Our
Telegraph Hill Dwellers Community.
Join Our Roster of Neighborhood-Serving Businesses.

For Ad Sizes and Rates, Contact:
Andy Katz at *andy.katz@thd.org*



SOL
Hot Yoga & Movement
www.solyogasf.com
910 Columbus Ave
(at Lombard next to the Comet Cleaners)

SF's original hot yoga studio. Newly renovated!

Private Studio Rental Available

INTRO SPECIAL
$60 ONE MONTH
UNLIMITED YOGA

DENNIS HEARNE
photographer

tel 415 989 5152

email dennishearne@mac.com
www.dennishearne.com
480 Francisco Street
San Francisco, Ca 94133

THE ITALIAN HOMEMADE Company

Marina
1919 Union Street
San Francisco, CA 94123
+1 (415) 655 93254

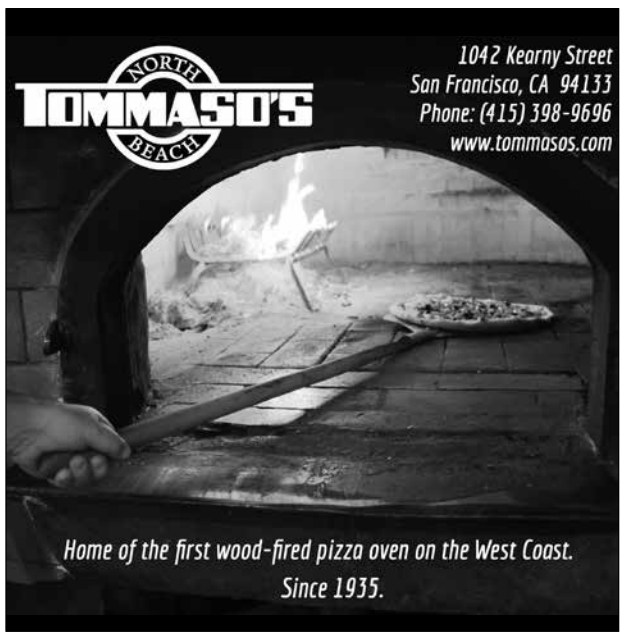
North Beach
716 Columbus Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94133
+1 (415) 712 8874

Hayes Valley
1 Franklin Street
San Francisco, CA 94102
+1 (415) 757 0877

Berkeley
2905 College Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94705
+1 (510) 649 1495

Long Beach
6460 E. Pacific Coast Hwy #130
Long Beach, CA 90803
+1 (562) 431 1700

italianhomemade.com



Breakfast & Lunch
7:30 to 2:30—this is 7 days a week.

PAT'S CAFE

Support Small Business

2330 Taylor Street
San Francisco, CA 94133
415-776-8735

AWESOME BREAKFASTS & LUNCHES

LETTERS TO MY DEAD NAME
(Life in transition)
Poems
by Richelle Lee Slota,
THD member
bluecedarpress.com

THD Committees Need You

Get involved in our neighborhood and make a difference! Join a THD committee and help keep the Hill a special place to live.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Budget: Peter Stevens *peter.stevens@thd.org*

Membership: Andy Katz *THDmembership@gmail.com*

Oral History Project Manager: John Doxey *oralhistory@thd.org*

Parks & Trees: Michael Rothmann *michael.rothmann@thd.org*

Planning & Zoning: Stan Hayes, Nancy Shanahan, and Mary Lipian *PZ@thd.org*

The Semaphore: Cap Caplan (Editor) *semaphore@thd.org*
David Lipkin (Photo Editor) *david.lipkin@thd.org*

Social & Programs (Dinners): Kristen Foley *social@thd.org*

Social & Programs (Events): Greta Alexander and Kim Pendleton *social@thd.org*

Transportation: Howard Wong *howard.wong@thd.org*

Waterfront: Greg Chiampou *waterfront@thd.org*

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Art & Culture: Nanci Gaglio *nanci.gaglio@thd.org*

Communications: Al Fontes *al.fontes@thd.org*

LIAISONS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Central Police District Community Advisory Board: Daryl Babbitt

Coalition for San Francisco Neighborhoods: Al Fontes

Friends of Washington Square: Michael Rothmann

Northern Advisory Committee Member: Stan Hayes

TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

Voice Mail: (415) 843-1011. Web Site: www.thd.org
P.O. Box 330159 • San Francisco, CA 94133

THD BOARD OFFICERS 2025-2026

President: Nick Ferris

Vice President: Peter Stevens

Recording Secretary: Mary Lipian

Corresponding Secretary: Kim Pendleton

Treasurer: Greg Giachino

Financial Secretary/Membership: Andy Katz

Historian: Nancy Shanahan

Past President: Stan Hayes

The Semaphore Editor: Cap Caplan

DIRECTORS

Term: 2025-2027

Theresa Flandrich

Nanci Gaglio

Ian Kloville

Michael Rothmann

Term: 2024-2026

Greta Alexander

Sarah Goldsmith

Katie Hopkins

Fran Schreiberg

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS!

There's no better way to be connected to your neighborhood and be a voice of the Hill than by joining Telegraph Hill Dwellers today.

Join at *thd.org*. If you'd prefer to have a brochure and sign-up form mailed to you, please send an email to *membership@thd.org*. Already a member? Give one as a gift!

Membership includes:

- A one-year subscription to news & events via email and a quarterly publication, *The Semaphore*.
- Opportunities to be active in your community. Your passion likely aligns to one of many committees.
- Social and Art & Culture events throughout the year—attend and contribute!

Annual Dues:

Individuals	$35
Households	$50
Seniors (65 and older)	$25
Senior Households	$40

Join now or give the gift of membership at *THD.org* or email *membership@thd.org*.

TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS
P. O. BOX 330159
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94133

p. 3

p. 8

p. 11

p. 7

THE SEMAPHORE

#250 Autumn 2025

FEATURES and COLUMNS

Kids Corner by Sarah Kliban 1
President's Corner: There's Nothing "Family" About It by Nick Ferris .. 2
Parks & Trees Report: Winners and Losers of the Summer by Michael Rothmann 3
Community Investments and Impacts: North Beach by Peter Stevens .. 3
District 3 Supervisor's Report: In Defense of the Mayor's Zoning Plan by Danny Sauter 4
Planning & Zoning Report: Mayor's Zoning Plan Advanced On a Close Planning Commission Vote by Nancy Shanahan, Stan Hayes, and Mary Lipian 5
Social & Programs Report: A Festive Fourth Quarter: Walking Tours, Holiday Cheer, and Jazz Nights by Greta Alexander and Kim Pendleton 6
Transportation Report: Transit Teetering: $$$ Future Funding by Howard Wong 7
Mayor Lurie's "Family Plan"—Is It Really For Families? Is It Even A Plan? by Romalyn Schmaltz 8
Waterfront Report: Whose Waterfront? by Greg Chiampou 10
Walk a Mile . . . by Patricia Cady 11
Board Meeting Highlights July-September 2025 by Mary Lipian ... 11
Meet the Filmmakers of *FREE FOR ALL: The Public Library* by Kathi Wheater 12
Restaurant News: Cafe Jacqueline by Steven Listisen 14
Introducing New Board Member Sarah Goldsmith 14
Treasurer's Report by Nick Ferris 14

THD BUSINESS

Board of Directors and Committees 15
Become a Member 15

SEMAPHORE STAFF

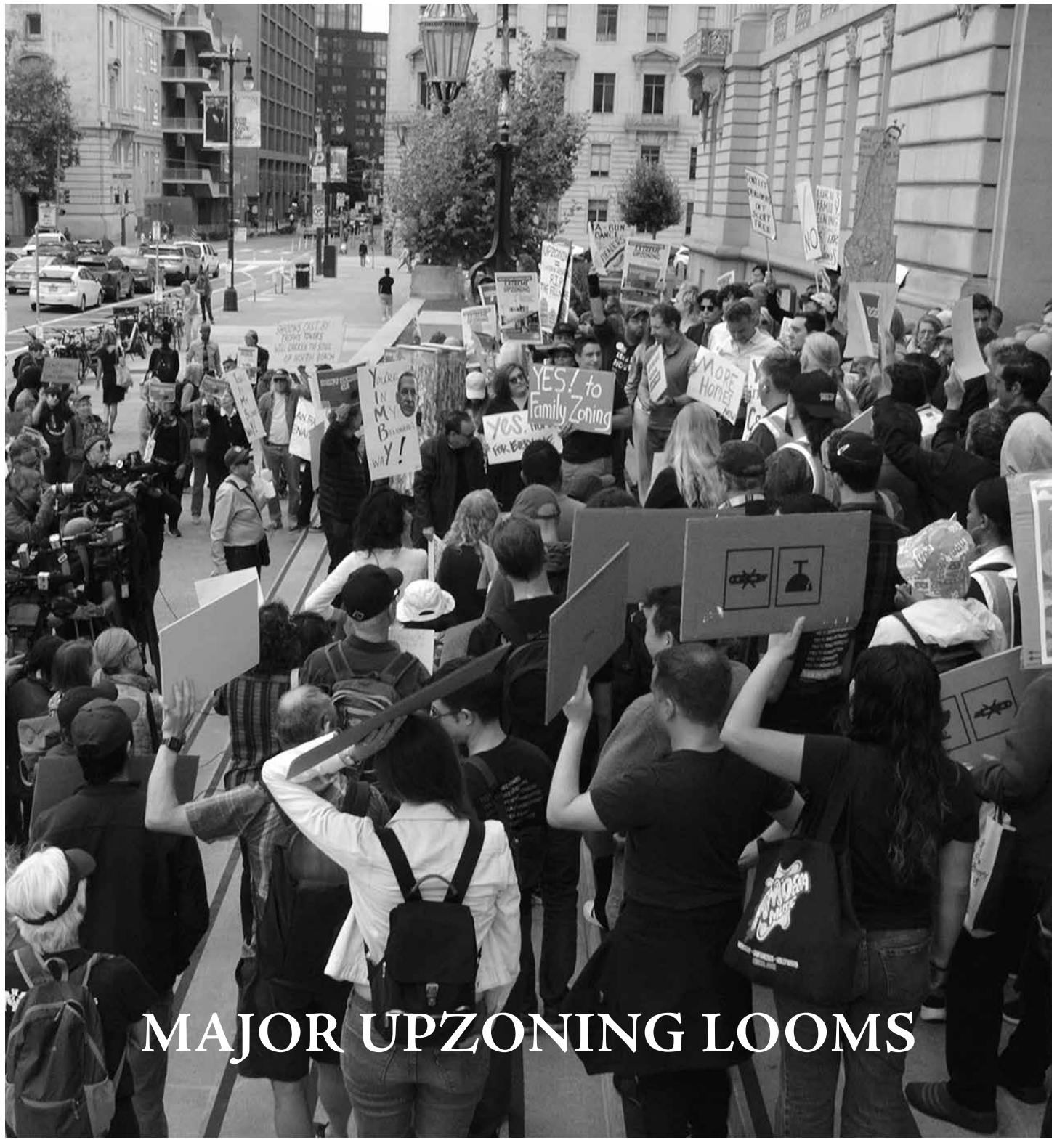
EDITOR: CAP CAPLAN — semaphore@thd.org
PHOTO EDITOR: DAVID LIPKIN — david.lipkin@thd.org
DESIGN AND LAYOUT ARTIST: CHRIS CARLSSON — carlsson.chris@gmail.com
AD SALES: ANDY KATZ — andy.katz@thd.org

The Semaphore is a publication of the Telegraph Hill Dwellers for its members. Articles, except for the summary of Board of Directors' Motions, do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Association or its officers but are the opinions of the writers of the individually copyrighted articles. The Association can take no responsibility for their content. No part of this membership publication may be reprinted or disseminated without permission in writing.
© 2025. Cover Photo: © Todd Darling, North Beach Media

The Semaphore

A Publication of the TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

Issue 250 Autumn 2025



MAJOR UPZONING LOOMS